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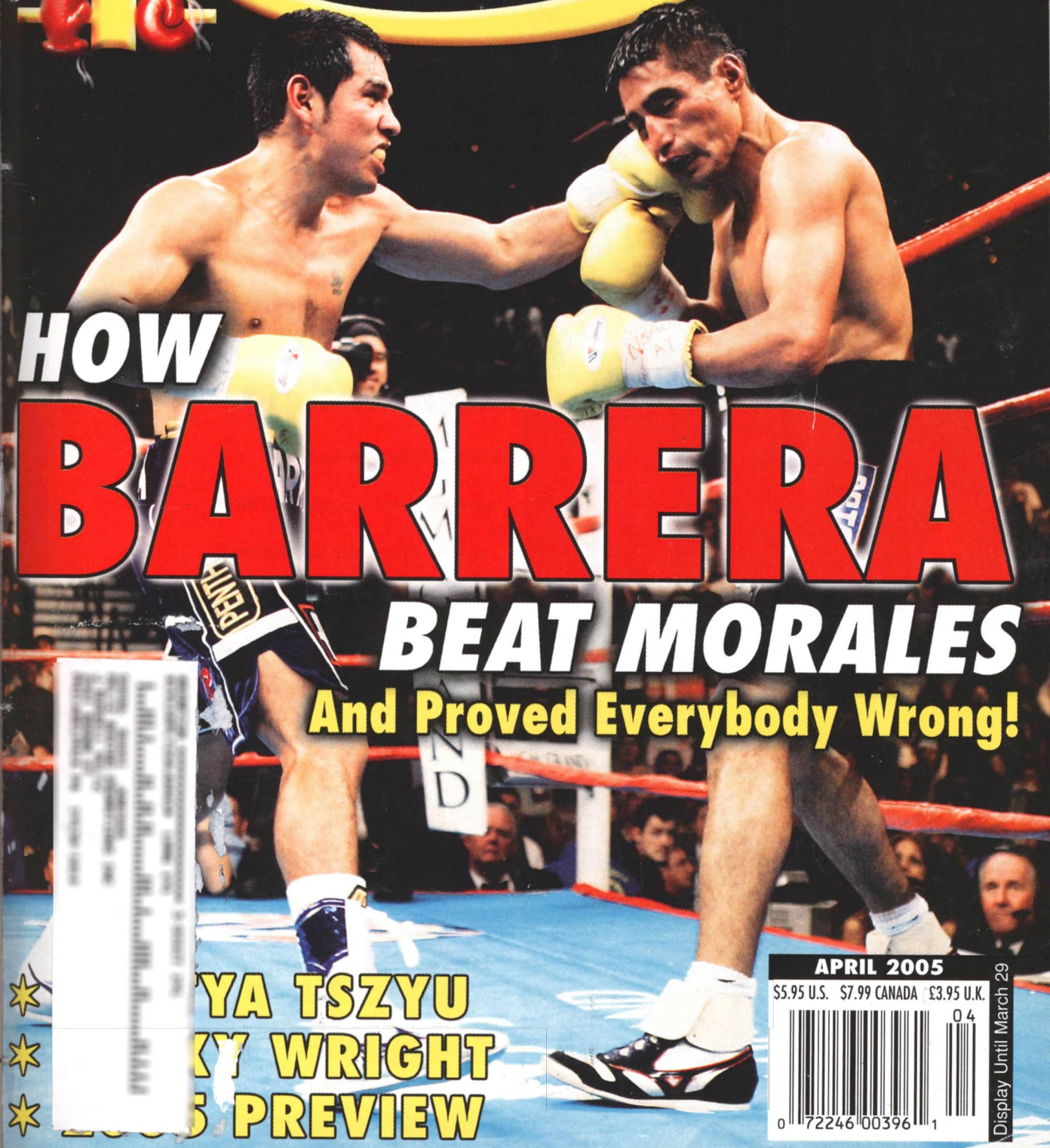

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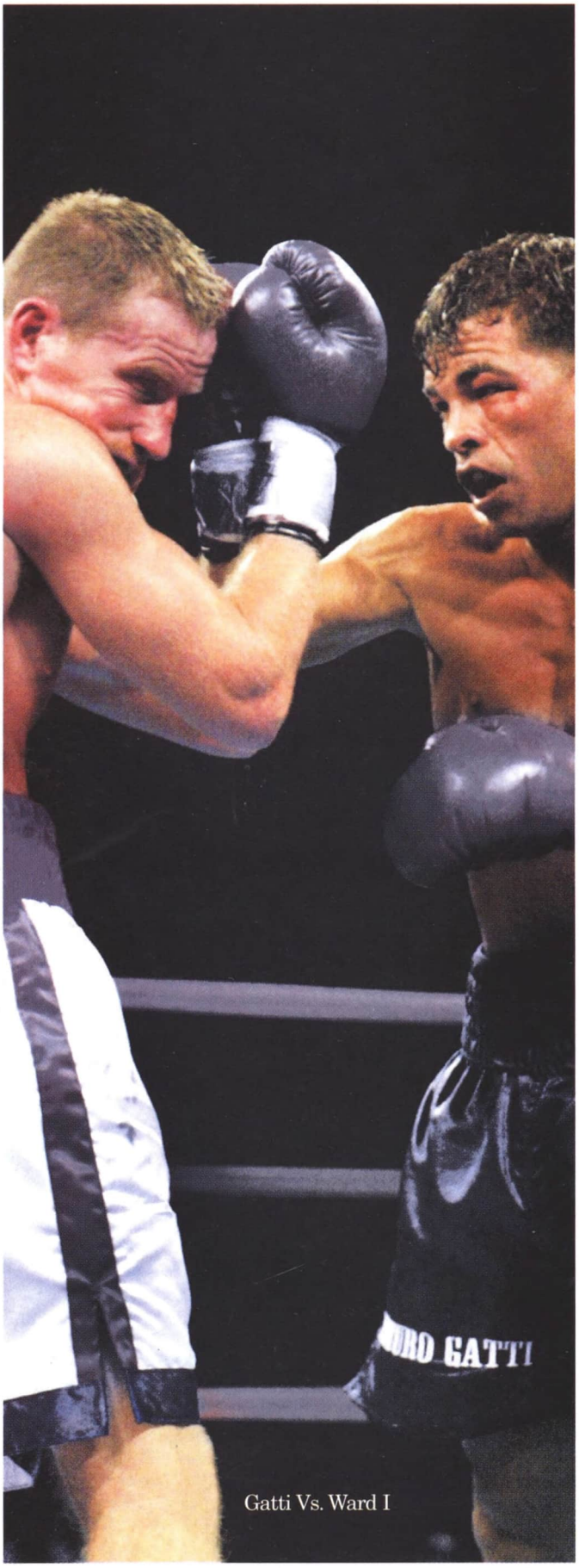

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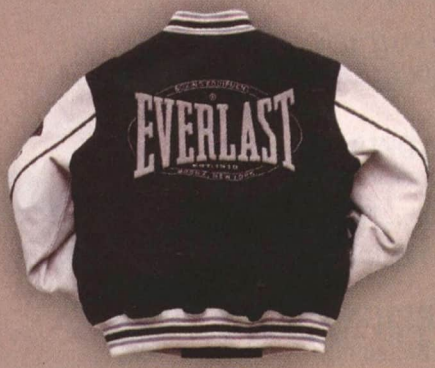

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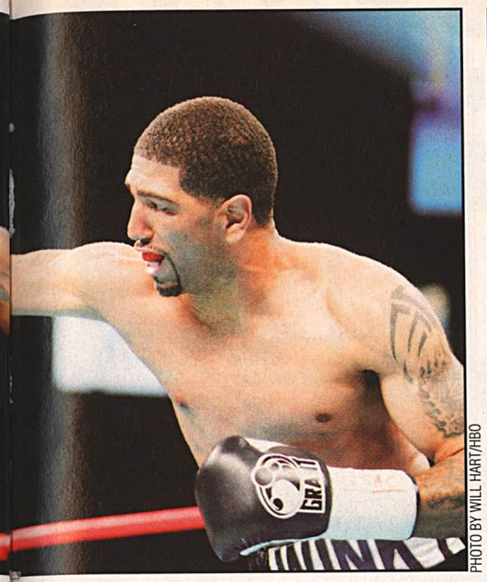

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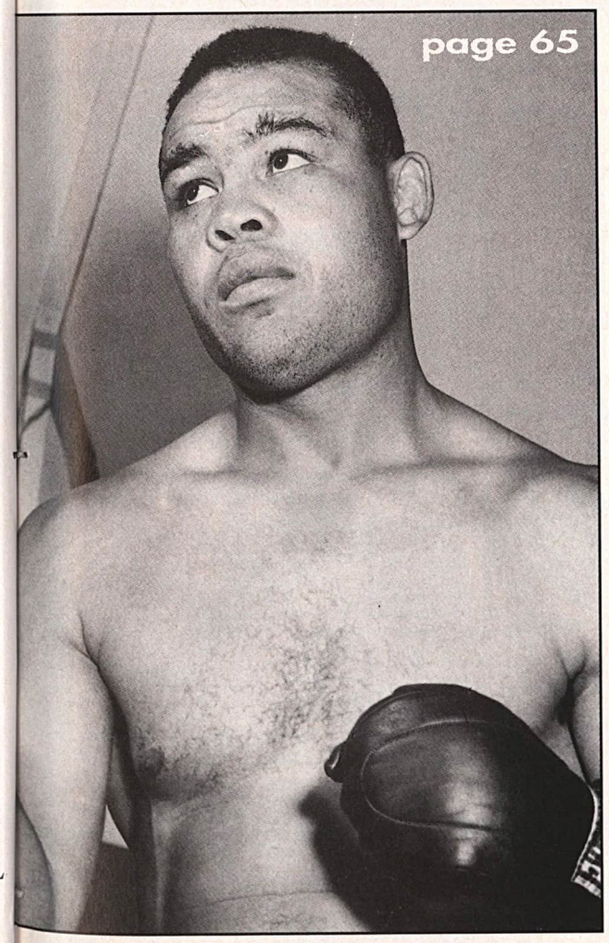

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RINGSIDE

The moment THE RING had been waiting for since we launched our new championship policy in the April 2002 issue finally came in November '04 when Antonio Tarver and Glen Johnson relinquished their alphabet titles in order to fight each other.

One of the major reasons that THE RING is so strongly opposed to the alphabet organizations is their counterproductive habit of moving undeserving boxers into mandatory positions and then forcing titleholders to fight them or be stripped of the belts they'd won in the ring. This system has led to such appalling mismatches as Roy Jones vs. Rick Frazier, Bernard Hopkins vs. Morrade Hakkar, and Shane Mosley vs. Shannan Taylor, just to name a few prominent examples.

The Alphabet Boys tried to pull the same scam with Tarver and Johnson. The WBC wanted Tarver to defend against Paul Briggs, while the IBF wanted Johnson to put his belt on the line against Rico Hoye. Neither match meant anything in the marketplace, and besides, HBO wanted to televise a much better bout between Tarver and Johnson, which was a natural due to the fact that both men had knocked out Roy Jones to establish themselves as the two best 175-pounders in the world.

Tarver and Johnson opted to do the right thing—right for them and right for the fans—so they gave up their alphabet hardware and accepted HBO's offer.

At the Los Angeles press conference to announce the fight, Tarver told the media: "Yes, I did give up my WBC championship and, yes, Glen Johnson gave up his IBF title. But I still have THE RING magazine championship, so that makes me the official light heavyweight champion."

Thank you, Antonio. I couldn't have said it any better.

To be fair, it should also be stated that both Tarver and Johnson will make much more money for fighting each other than they would doing the alphabet gangs' bidding. And that's fine with THE RING. Fighters deserve to make as much money as possible, and the way to do that is to fight the best possible opponents.

Barring anything unforeseen, the Tarver-Johnson light heavyweight championship fight will be over by the time you read this, and if Johnson springs another upset, he'll be getting a RING championship belt just like the one I gave Tarver for his title-winning victory over Jones. But regardless of who has prevailed, boxing will be the big winner. Instead of pleasing a collection of self-serving powerbrokers in East Orange, New Jersey, and Mexico City, the industry is pleasing the folks who pay all the bills, the boxing consumer. Hopefully, it is a trend that will continue to grow throughout the new year.

***

The Sweet Science is seldom treated with the respect it's due, so I was delighted with the classy manner in which the National Museum of American Jewish History handled its "Sting Like A Maccabee: The Golden Age Of American Jewish Boxing" exhibit that opened in Philadelphia in November.

It's a wonderful display, beautifully mounted, that includes everything from "Slapsie" Maxie Rosenbloom's trunks to a cup, saucer, and menu from Lew Tendler's long-defunct restaurant. There is a video loop of famous Jewish fighters in action and a collection of new paintings of famous Jewish fighters by artist Charles Miller that provides a colorful juxtaposition to the well-worn artifacts. There's even a display dedicated to Nat Fleischer, the founder of THE RING.

The exhibit runs until May, and I urge every boxing fan within striking distance of Philadelphia to check it out. Best of all, it only costs $4 ($3 for children). The Web address is www.nmajh.org.

Nigel Collins
Editor-in-Chief

Volume 84, No. 3 **April 2005**

The RING

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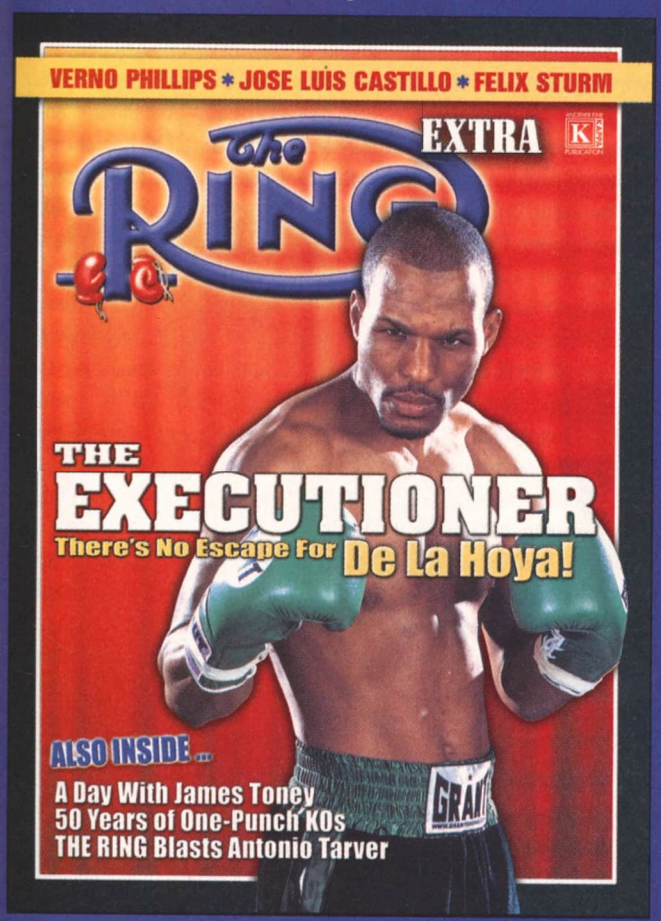

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ROUND ONE

FROM ANTAGONISTS TO ASSOCIATES

It's perhaps the most unexpected pairing in boxing since *Rocky III*, when Rocky and Apollo, once bitter rivals in the ring, became part of the same team. Only two months after battling in the premier superfight of 2004, Oscar De La Hoya and Bernard Hopkins announced in November that they've joined forces as promoters. From De La Hoya's perspective, it's a case of the old cliche, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em. And for Hopkins, the thinking must be even if you can beat 'em, join 'em anyway.

Hopkins will be promoted by De La Hoya, but he'll also be De La Hoya's business partner. De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions signed the middleweight champ to a four-fight deal with an option for a fifth fight, although there's a good chance Hopkins will quit fighting by the end of 2005 only two or three fights into the contract. The terms included a signing bonus of $1-million. De La Hoya also announced that Hopkins is now part-owner of the company, with the title of president of Golden Boy Promotions East. As GBP is mostly a West Coast company specializing in promoting Hispanic fighters, Hopkins' job will entail expanding Golden Boy across to the other side of the U.S. and adding more black fighters to the stable.

De La Hoya declared his rapidly growing company "the future of boxing," and considering the age of the top promoters in the sport—Don King is 72 and Bob Arum is 73—the timing gives that statement a chance of coming true. Arum, of course, has promoted all but two fights of De La Hoya's career and seemed poised to begin promoting Hopkins as well, but this new arrangement left his promotional company, Top Rank, out in the cold. But Arum didn't seem to mind too much. He felt Hopkins was overpricing himself in negotiations with Top Rank, and he suggested De La Hoya's drawing power is on the slide.

Not that any of it matters quite as much to Arum anymore anyway; in a separate announcement made just days before the De La Hoya-Hopkins lovefest began, Arum said that he was stepping down as president of Top Rank and handing the reins over to his stepson, Todd duBoef. Arum will still remain involved—perhaps even in charge, reading between the lines—for the major fights. But the day-to-day operations and traveling to all of the smaller fight cards will now fall upon the 37-year-old duBoef.

Oscar and Bernard are fighting on the same side now

Whether Top Rank can remain on top without its number-one star and with Arum working in a diminished capacity remains to be seen. Top Rank's success may depend in part on how successful rival company Golden Boy will be now that Hopkins is working and fighting under Oscar's umbrella.

"I went with Oscar because it was a bigger picture for me after boxing," Hopkins said. "I made a business decision, slash, a decision to change boxing forever."

Considering Hopkins' past promotional agreements have never lasted too long, there's plenty of skepticism about what "forever" means. But for as long as this partnership lasts, it'll pump up publicity for both guys, at the very least.

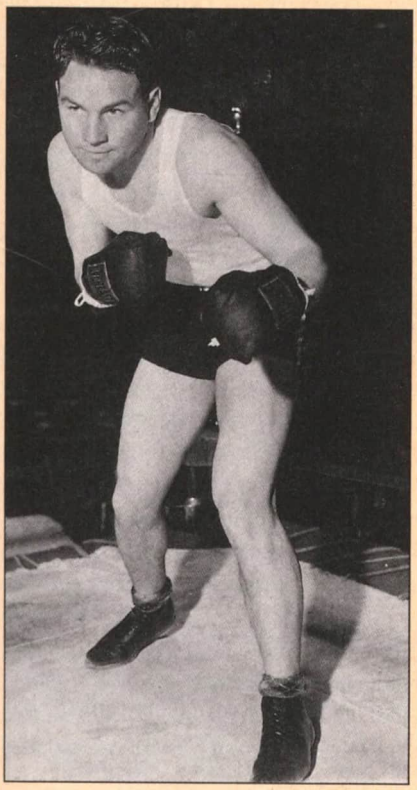
—Eric Raskin

JIMMY McLARNIN, 1907-2004

"My motto," proclaimed Jimmy McLarnin in 1933, "is to eat right, sleep right, think right, and you'll live to a ripe old age." He might've added, "And don't get hit in the head when you're over 30," for surely McLarnin's decision to step away from the firing line at 28 contributed to the ripe old age—96—achieved by the legendary two-time welterweight champion when death came on October 28.

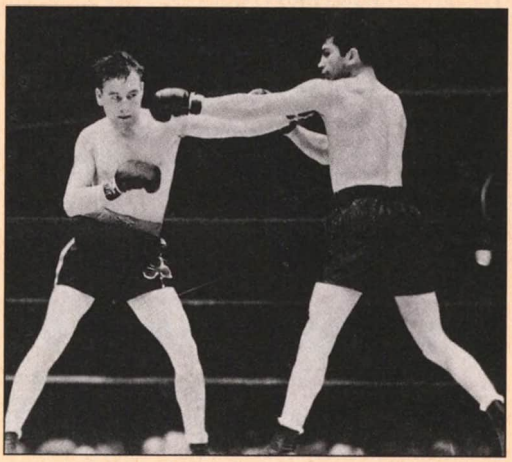
His sensible lifestyle and early retirement alone entitle James Archibald McLarnin to his own rarified niche in ring history. Throw in his innate class, mega-watt personality, and the remarkable skills that made him one of the greatest fighters of his time, and the argument can easily be made that McLarnin presented the best face of boxing.

Although he once cited James J. Corbett, Gene Tunney, and Benny Leonard as his personal role models because they "reached the top mostly through science and brains," McLarnin was also a first-rate puncher. But he always insisted it was speed, not punching power, that accounted for his success.



Hall of Famer McLarnin in his fighting prime

For that, and so much more, he could thank Charles "Pop" Foster, the ex-booth fighter who used the template of "Peerless" Jim Driscoll when he began developing the puny McLarnin, then hardly a teenager, in the gym Foster set up in the basement of the used furniture store McLarnin's Irish immigrant father operated in Vancouver, British Columbia. They became one of the greatest and closest teams—"Foster, McLarnin, Inc.," was the headline of a story about them in a 1933 issue of THE RING—in the history of boxing.



McLarnin (left) exchanges with rival Ross

McLarnin was barely a flyweight, and technically too young to turn pro, when they headed for California in 1922, and it was a while before any promoter would risk using such a milk-faced tenderfoot. But the concern was all for the other guys once the kid they called "Baby Face" got going. McLarnin didn't lose for more than two years, until ex-bantamweight champion Bud Taylor decisioned him.

In his very next bout, McLarnin beat flyweight champ Pancho Villa in a non-title bout, launching his reputation as, in Nat Fleischer's words, "devastator of champions." By the time he was finished in 1936, McLarnin had defeated 13 fighters who held or would hold a world title: Villa, Taylor, Fidel LaBarba, Jackie Fields, Louis "Kid" Kaplan, Sammy Mandell, Young Jack Thompson, Al Singer, Benny Leonard, Young Corbett III, Barney Ross, Tony Canzoneri, and, in McLarnin's final bout, Lou Ambers.

He lost his attempt at Mandell's 135-pound belt in 1928, but two years later—and still three away from flattening Corbett in one round for the welterweight title—THE RING's Eddie Borden anointed McLarnin as "the greatest of all modern-day pugilists."

McLarnin's three-fight championship series in 1934-'35 with Ross, in which the latter won the title by split decision in the first fight, lost by a split verdict in the second, and re-won it by 2-1 vote in the third, was a classic that drew a total of 125,000 fans.

To review contemporary accounts of McLarnin's fights is to be awed by his consistently thrilling performances, and his genuine humility. "I still wear the same hat size," he said after winning the title. No wonder that, when a few rare hisses were aimed McLarnin's way after he knocked out Sammy Fuller in eight rounds in 1932, Fleischer pleaded editorially with fans not to "disgust [McLarnin] with his vocation so that he will hang up his gloves at a time when there are so few real battlers left in the ring."

The dignified McLarnin in his later years

When he did go, with a record of 62-11-3 (20) and a full bank account, McLarnin became as successful in life as he was in boxing. That he lived so long and well befitted the man Pop Foster (who bequeathed McLarnin $300,000 upon his own death) once called, with justifiable pride, an "ideal athlete and credit to the sport in which he is so popular."

—Pete Ehrmann

TV FIGHTS OF THE MONTH

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
11-5-04	Sugar Ray Narh KO 6 Rogelio Barron	Telef	jw	C-	C+	C+
All right, we've gone about as far as we can with the Sugar Ray stuff, haven't we?						
11-5-04	Steven Luevano W 10 Aldo Valtierra	Telef	f	C+	B-	C+
We think Luevano's cornermen landed more punches than did Valtierra; what a wipeout						
11-5-04	Mauricio Martinez Tech. Win 5 Gerardo Espinoza	Telem	b	C+	B-	D
This might have gotten interesting if not for the blood everywhere						
11-6-04	**Kostya Tszyu KO 3 Sharmba Mitchell**	**Show**	**World jw**	**A+**	**A**	**B**
Sharmba should have blown out his knee in the locker room again; he might have lasted longer						
11-12-04	Phillip Payne KO 5 Roberto Tamayo	Telef	f	C-	C-	D+
Sometimes the best thing to do is turn around and wait for the ref to save you; this was one of those times						
11-12-04	Yanqui Diaz W 10 Vaughn Bean	Telef	h	C+	C-	F
Do you think when John Ruiz was a kid he had posters of Bean up all over his room?						
11-13-04	Larry Donald W 12 Evander Holyfield	PPV	h	C+	C	D-
If Evander wants to continue making third-raters look like Muhammad Ali, it's his prerogative						
11-13-04	Hasim Rahman KO 4 Kali Meehan	PPV	h	B	B	C+
Hey, Lamon: See how things work out when you punch? You should try it some time						
11-13-04	Chris Byrd W 12 Jameel McCline	PPV	h	A-	B	C+
For a defensive guy and supposed cutie, Byrd has been in some decent fights lately						
11-13-04	John Ruiz W 12 Andrew Golota	PPV	h	B+	B+	B-
Was that Norm Stone making an ass of himself and getting booted, or David Coverdale?						
11-18-04	Cesar Morales W 12 Clarence Vinson	HBOL	b	C+	B+	B+
This could have gone either way, but the sooner Vinson realizes he's not a puncher the better off he'll be						
11-18-04	Jhonny Gonzalez KO 2 Gabriel Elizondo	HBOL	b	B-	A-	B
Gonzalez rises from first-round knockdown to floor Elizondo four times						
11-19-04	Roger Gonzalez W 8 Oscar Andrade	Telef	b	C	C+	C+
Gonzalez passes tough test in wily Andrade; good time to step up						
11-19-04	Daniel Ponce DeLeon KO 4 Julio Gamboa	Telef	jf	B-	C+	C+
If anyone finds something unexciting about Ponce DeLeon, let us know please						
11-19-04	Shamone Alvarez KO 1 Mohammed Kayongo	Show	w	C	B+	C+
Anyone else sick of guys who jump up right after the ref says "10"?						
11-19-04	Troy Rowland W 10 Epifanio Mendoza	Show	m	C+	A-	B-
They must have had to tie down Tommy Hearns at ringside during this one						
11-20-04	**Winky Wright W 12 Shane Mosley**	**HBO**	**World jm**	**A+**	**B+**	**C+**
What will it take for Mosley to admit after a fight that, no, he didn't deserve the decision?						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship fights in **bold** type)

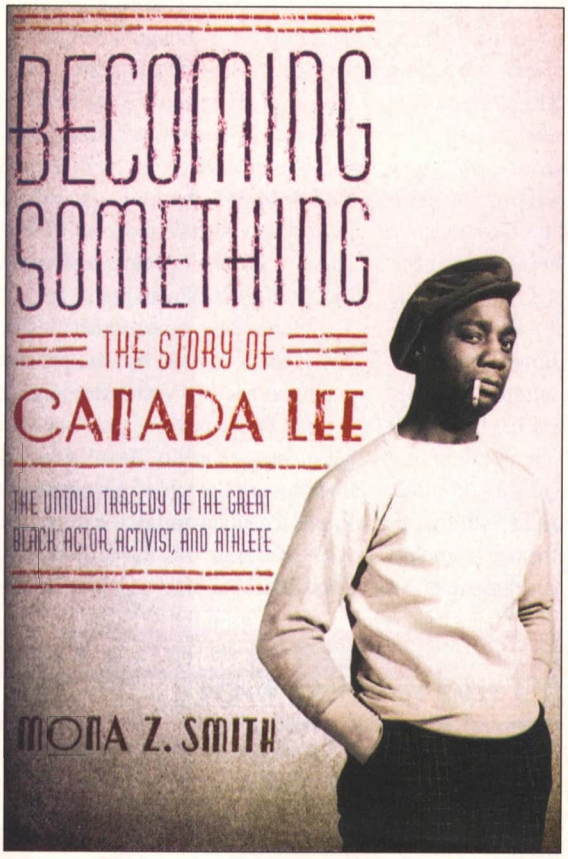
Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox Sports Net; Uni—Univision; Telef—Telefutura; Telem—Telemundo; HBO L—HBO Latino

THE BOXING BOOKSHELF

After blindness in one eye ended his career as a top welterweight contender in the late-1920s and early-'30s, Canada Lee went on to become one of the most exalted actors of the American stage and a leading celebrity activist for leftist political causes. When the Cold War dawned, he was almost totally blind to the realities of the "Evil Empire" another actor named Ronald Reagan would eventually wear down and defeat, and Lee's unwillingness to rid his corner of Communists and fellow travelers made him at least guilty of bad political judgment.

That would be, as they say on the cable-TV screamfest *Crossfire*, the view from the political right. The opposite view is that Lee was one of many performers of pure liberal stripe whose careers and lives were ruined by politicians, newspaper columnists, and movie studio quislings whose methods were as devious and un-American as those of the Reds they saw under every bed.



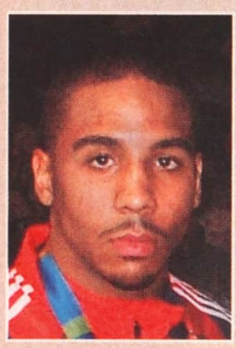
There is ample evidence to support either or both conclusions in *Becoming Something: The Story Of Canada Lee* (Faber and Faber Inc., 430 pages, hardcover, $27), thanks to the scrupulous research of author Mona Z. Smith. That she clearly tilts to the second view herself does nothing to detract from this excellent and highly recommended biography of the man who, as Smith quotes from the Bible of Boxing itself, was the "Sugar Ray Robinson of his time."

Long after Lee Canegata—who permanently became Canada Lee when famed ring announcer Joe Humphries had a bad night—traded his boxing gloves for greasepaint, the acclaimed co-star of the still-revered films *Lifeboat* and *Body And Soul* credited boxing for his riveting stage presence, and said, "I would give my life's blood if all this praise was for me winning the title instead of making a hit on the stage."

Lee's strenuous public battles against racism and for an egalitarian society made him a target of those who thought actors should confine themselves to reciting what's on the script. In the view of this unreconstructed troglodyte, Lee ought to have paid more attention to the motives and resumes of some of the people whooping alongside him. But off the record laid out so skillfully by Smith, it's impossible not to admire his idealism, dignity, and achievements, and feel proud that they stemmed in large part from what Lee learned and did between the ropes.

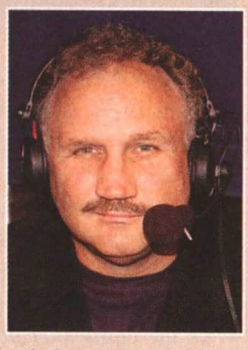
—Pete Ehrmann

OUTSIDE THE ROPES



Ward: Signs dual promotional contract

In the first case of successful prosecution of fight fixing in Nevada, a federal jury found boxer **Thomas Williams** and matchmaker **Robert Mitchell** guilty of sports bribery and conspiracy to commit sports bribery in early-November. The jury determined that bribes of more than $70,000 were paid to fix fights between March 1995 and August 2000, culminating with a fight in which Williams was alleged to have taken a dive against **Richie Melito** in Las Vegas (despite Nevada Athletic Commission Executive Director **Marc Ratner** saying that he thought that particular first-round knockout appeared legitimate). Both Williams and Mitchell face up to five years in prison ... Another attempt by former IBF President **Bob Lee** to get out of jail failed in early-November. Lee petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to review whether his rights were violated when a conversation with IBF informant **Doug Beavers** was taped without a warrant, but the court ruled that no warrant was needed ... The United States' lone 2004 Olympic gold medalist, **Andre Ward**, signed a promotional contract in late-November, and will be represented by both Goossen-Tutor Promotions and Square Ring (**Roy Jones'** promotional company). Ward had previously signed a managerial contract with **James Prince** ... Under a statute passed by the Nevada Commission in early-November, the commission will now provide a list of at least three possible referees and six possible judges for all title fights, and any objection lodged by a boxer, manager, or promoter against a selected referee or judge prior to a fight will now be discussed in a public meeting. "I'm not sure there was a problem before, but this statute makes the process more transparent for everyone," NSAC Chairman **John Bailey** told the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. The new policy passed unanimously ... We reported in the June 2004 issue that Minnesota junior middleweight **Matt Vanda** was arrested after drugs were found in a search of his home by police in February. Vanda was cleared of all charges in early-November ... Speaking of Minnesotans, former heavyweight contender and ESPN2 boxing analyst **Scott LeDoux** won a seat on the Anoka County Commission in the November 2 election. LeDoux's promise to reduce traffic congestion was reportedly the key issue ... Longtime trainer **"Slim" Jim Robinson** died in early-November of pancreatic cancer at the age of 74. Among the top fighters trained by Robinson were titleholders **Eddie Mustapha Muhammad**, **Tim Witherspoon**, **Mike Rossman**, and **Ricky Parkey**, as well as heavyweight contender **Razor Ruddock**. Just before he passed away, it was announced that Robinson was to be inducted in the New Jersey Boxing Hall of Fame ... Former Olympic bronze medalist **Eiji Morioka** died of cancer in early-November in his native Japan at the age of 58. The outstanding amateur medalled in the bantamweight class in the 1968 Olympics, but his pro career was a disappointment, ending in just two years after Morioka suffered four losses in 10 fights. Japan has not produced an Olympic medalist since Morioka ... **Emilio "Don" Lastreto**, who served for several decades as the chief ringside physician for fights in San Francisco, died in late-October at age 95. When inducted in 1986, Lastreto was the only non-athlete in the San Francisco Sports Hall of Fame.



LeDoux: Wins election in Minnesota

THE PUNCHLINES

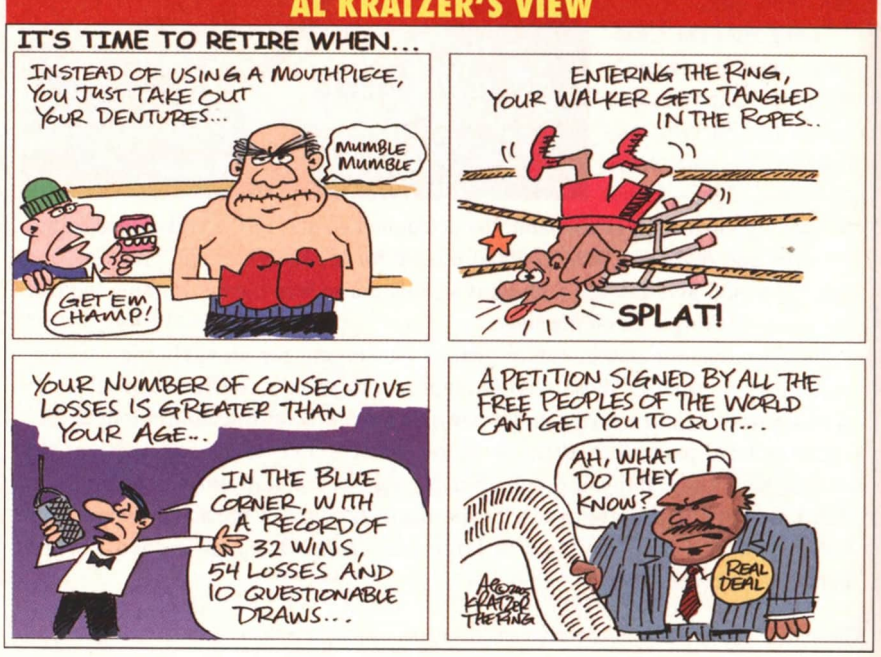
"I thank Shane Mosley. Without him, I'd still be fighting on ESPN in West Virginia."

—Winky Wright, after scoring his second-straight HBO-televised win over Mosley

"Did you ask first?"

—Late-night television host Jimmy Kimmel, to Mike Tyson, after Tyson said he'd seen tennis star Serena Williams earlier in the day and felt her muscles

AL KRATZER'S VIEW



The RING
"THE BIBLE OF BOXING"

RATINGS ANALYSIS

POUND-FOR-POUND

1. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
   Middleweight
2. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Junior Welterweight
3. **ANTONIO TARVER**
   Light Heavyweight
4. **KOSTYA TSZYU**
   Junior Welterweight
5. **WINKY WRIGHT**
   Junior Middleweight
6. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
   Featherweight
7. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
   Featherweight
8. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
   Junior Lightweight
9. **ERIK MORALES**
   Junior Lightweight
10. **JAMES TONEY**
    Heavyweight

(For period ended November 29, 2004)

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Hasim Rahman's impressive TKO of Kali Meehan allows him to jump from fourth to third, trading places with inactive James Toney.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No changes.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: No changes.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Mikkel Kessler debuts at number two after knocking out Manny Siaca, who plummets from second to 10th. Charles Brewer (sixth last issue) exits following his stoppage loss to unranked Mario Veit. Brewer's departure allows Markus Beyer (10th last issue), Jeff Lacy (ninth last issue), Robin Reid (eighth last issue), and Mads Larsen (seventh last issue) to advance one spot each.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Shane Mosley slips from first to second following his decision loss to champion Winky Wright. Kassim Ouma (second last issue) takes over the number-one spot.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Sharmba Mitchell slides from first to fourth following his knockout loss to champion Kostya Tszyu. This allows Arturo Gatti (second last issue), Vivian Harris (third last issue), and Floyd Mayweather (fourth last issue) to climb one rung each.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Marco Antonio Barrera (second at featherweight last issue) takes over the top spot thanks to his decision over Erik Morales, who slips from first to second. Barrera's move up from 126 pounds forces everybody rated last issue down one position each, while Mzonke Fana (10th last issue) is gone for the time being.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Barrera (second last issue) is now a junior lightweight, which moves up Scott Harrison (third last issue), Injin Chi (fourth last issue), Manuel Medina (fifth last issue), Rocky Juarez (sixth last issue), and Zahir Raheem (seventh last issue) one place each. Derrick Gainer (eighth last issue) has not fought in more than a year and departs due to inactivity. Combined with Barrera's departure, Gainer's exit pushes up Michael Brodie (ninth last issue) and Chris John (10th last issue) two places each, while newcomers Spend Abazi and Nicky Cook are aboard at nine and 10, respectively.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Mahyar Monshipour (third last issue) moves to number two following his kayo of Yoddamrong Sithyodthong, who slides from sixth to eighth. Israel Vazquez descends from second to third to accommodate Monshipour's advancement, while Yoddamrong's decline allows Jorge Lacierva to improve from seventh to sixth and Salim Medjkoune to advance from eighth to seventh.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Mauricio Pastrana (10th last issue) departs after being stopped by Rafael Marquez at bantamweight. Jose Navarro returns at number 10.

FLYWEIGHTS: Brahim Asloum (eighth last issue) trades places withVic Darchinyan (seventh last issue) following Asloum's decision over Noel Arambulet, who was the sixth ranked strawweight going into their match.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: Jose Aguirre (fifth at strawweight last issue) jumps into the seventh spot at 108 pounds with a win over Kermin Guardia, who slips from seventh to eighth. Aguirre's move pushes down Ulises Solis (eighth last issue) and Roberto Vasquez (ninth last issue) one slot each, while Hugo Cazares (10th last issue) is gone.

STRAWWEIGHTS: Arambulet falls from sixth to ninth after losing at a higher weight, and combined with Aguirre's departure, that allows Ivan Calderon (seventh last issue), Juan Landaeta (eighth last issue), Chana Porpaoin (ninth last issue), and Isaac Bustos (10th last issue) to advance two spots each. Rodel Mayol is new at number 10.

POUND-FOR-POUND: Major shakeup: Kostya Tszyu jumps from eighth to fourth after knocking out Sharmba Mitchell, and Marco Antonio Barrera returns at number eight following decision over Erik Morales, who drops from fifth to ninth. The new alignment also moves Winky Wright (fourth last issue) to fifth and James Toney (ninth last issue) to 10th. Jose Luis Castillo (10th last issue) falls out to accommodate Barrera's return. ■

THE RING RATINGS

For Period Ended November 29, 2004

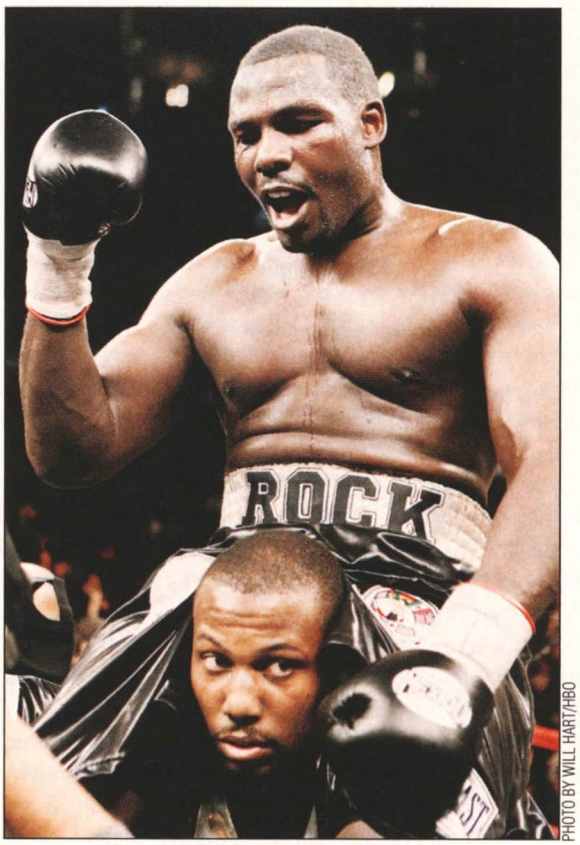


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Hasim Rahman advanced one spot at heavyweight by knocking out Kali Meehan

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by THE RING are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between THE RING'S number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

Ratings By The Editors

HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Unlimited

Champ: VITALI KLITSCHKO
Ukraine 34-2 (33)

1. **CHRIS BYRD**
Flint, MI 38-2-1 (20)
2. **JOHN RUIZ**
Methuen, MA 41-5-1 (28)
3. **HASIM RAHMAN**
Baltimore, MD 40-5-1 (33)
4. **JAMES TONEY**
Ann Arbor, MI 68-4-2 (43)
5. **MONTE BARRETT**
Queens, NY 30-3 (6)
6. **ANDREW GOLOTA**
Poland 38-5-1 (31)
7. **FRES OQUENDO**
Puerto Rico 24-3 (15)
8. **JAMEEL McCLINE**
Port Jefferson, NY 31-4-1 (19)
9. **DANNY WILLIAMS**
England 32-3 (27)
10. **LAMON BREWSTER**
Los Angeles, CA 31-2 (27)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: WINKY WRIGHT
St. Petersburg, FL 48-3 (25)

1. **KASSIM OUMA**
W. Palm Beach, FL 20-1-1 (13)
2. **SHANE MOSLEY**
Pomona, CA 39-4 (35)
3. **VERNO PHILLIPS**
Aurora, CO 38-9-1 (20)
4. **DANIEL SANTOS**
Puerto Rico 29-2-1 (20)
5. **FERNANDO VARGAS**
Oxnard, CA 24-2 (22)
6. **TRAVIS SIMMS**
Norwalk, CT 24-0 (18)
7. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO**
Spain 58-5 (40)
8. **RODNEY JONES**
Lafayette, LA 34-3 (22)
9. **KOFI JANTUAH**
Las Vegas, NV 28-1 (18)
10. **BRONCO McKART**
Monroe, MI 47-6 (31)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: MANNY PACQUIAO
Philippines 38-2-2 (29)

1. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
Mexico 43-2-1 (33)
2. **SCOTT HARRISON**
Scotland 23-2-1 (13)
3. **INJIN CHI**
South Korea 29-2-1 (18)
4. **MANUEL MEDINA**
Mexico 63-14 (29)
5. **ROCKY JUAREZ**
Houston, TX 21-0 (14)
6. **ZAHIR RAHEEM**
Tulsa, OK 25-1 (15)
7. **MICHAEL BRODIE**
England 35-2-1 (23)
8. **CHRIS JOHN**
Indonesia 34-0 (19)
9. **SPEND ABAZI**
Denmark 31-1 (10)
10. **NICKY COOK**
England 24-0 (14)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **OSCAR LARIOS**
Mexico 54-3-1 (35)
2. **MAHYAR MONSHIPOUR**
France 26-2-2 (17)
3. **ISRAEL VAZQUEZ**
Mexico 36-3 (27)
4. **JOAN GUZMAN**
Dominican Republic 22-0 (17)
5. **JOSE LUIS VALBUENA**
Venezuela 24-3-1 (14)
6. **JORGE LACIERVA**
Mexico 26-5-5 (18)
7. **SALIM MEDJKOUNE**
France 43-5-1 (21)
8. **YODDAMRONG SITHYODTHONG**
Thailand 40-2-1 (18)
9. **ART SIMONYAN**
Glendale, CA 14-0-1 (7)
10. **DANIEL PONCE DELEON**
Mexico 22-0 (21)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **RAFAEL MARQUEZ**
Mexico 33-3 (30)
2. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM**
Thailand 46-1-2 (32)
3. **RATANACHAI VORAPIN**
Thailand 58-8 (39)
4. **GENARO GARCIA**
Mexico 32-4 (20)
5. **CRUZ CARBAJAL**
Mexico 24-12-1 (20)
6. **TOSHIAKI NISHIOKA**
Japan 24-4-3 (14)
7. **SILENCE MABUZA**
South Africa 17-0 (15)
8. **RICARDO VARGAS**
Mexico 36-10-3 (11)
9. **JHONNY GONZALEZ**
Mexico 26-4 (24)
10. **JULIO ZARATE**
Mexico 21-2-1 (13)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **WAYNE BRAITHWAITE**
   Guyana 21-0 (17)
2. **JEAN-MARC MORMECK**
   France 30-2 (21)
3. **JOHNNY NELSON**
   England 44-12-2 (29)
4. **O'NEIL BELL**
   Atlanta, GA 23-1-1 (22)
5. **KELVIN DAVIS**
   Reno, NV 21-2-1 (16)
6. **CARL THOMPSON**
   England 33-6 (25)
7. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
   Philadelphia, PA 16-0 (9)
8. **VIRGIL HILL**
   Bismarck, ND 49-5 (23)
9. **DALE BROWN**
   Canada 32-3-1 (20)
10. **PIETRO AURINO**
    Italy 30-2 (14)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: ANTONIO TARVER
Orlando, FL 22-2 (18)

1. **GLEN JOHNSON**
   Miami, FL 41-9-2 (28)
2. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
   Hungary 21-0 (13)
3. **ROY JONES**
   Pensacola, FL 49-3 (38)
4. **JULIO GONZALEZ**
   Huntington Beach, CA 36-2 (22)
5. **DARIUSZ MICHALCZEWSKI**
   Germany 48-1 (38)
6. **CLINTON WOODS**
   England 36-3-1 (22)
7. **FABRICE TIOZZO**
   Franco 46-2 (30)
8. **PAUL BRIGGS**
   Australia 23-1 (17)
9. **THOMAS ULRICH**
   Germany 27-1 (19)
10. **RICO HOYE**
    Detroit, MI 18-0 (14)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JOE CALZAGHE**
   Wales 38-0 (30)
2. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
   Denmark 35-0 (27)
3. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
   Australia 22-2 (17)
4. **ANTWUN ECHOLS**
   Davenport, IA 30-5-1 (26)
5. **DANNY GREEN**
   Australia 19-1 (18)
6. **MADS LARSEN**
   Denmark 45-2 (37)
7. **ROBIN REID**
   England 37-4-1 (27)
8. **JEFF LACY**
   St. Petersburg, FL 17-0 (14)
9. **MARKUS BEYER**
   Germany 30-2 (12)
10. **MANNY SIACA**
    Puerto Rico 18-5 (16)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: BERNARD HOPKINS
Philadelphia, PA 45-2-1 (32)

1. **HOWARD EASTMAN**
   England 40-1 (35)
2. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA**
   Los Angeles, CA 37-4 (29)
3. **FELIX STURM**
   Germany 21-1 (9)
4. **FELIX TRINIDAD**
   Puerto Rico 42-1 (35)
5. **ROBERT ALLEN**
   Atlanta, GA 36-5 (27)
6. **WILLIAM JOPPY**
   Washington, D.C. 34-3-1 (25)
7. **JERMAIN TAYLOR**
   Little Rock, AR 21-0 (16)
8. **MASELINO MASOE**
   New Zealand 26-2 (25)
9. **KINGSLEY IKEKE**
   Canada 21-1 (11)
10. **SAM SOLIMAN**
    Australia 28-7 (10)

WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: CORY SPINKS
St. Louis, MO 34-2 (11)

1. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
   Mexico 30-4 (21)
2. **ZAB JUDAH**
   Brooklyn, NY 32-2 (23)
3. **THOMAS DAMGAARD**
   Denmark 34-0 (26)
4. **MICHELE PICCIRILLO**
   Italy 44-2 (27)
5. **MANUEL GOMEZ**
   Mexico 26-10-1 (19)
6. **KERMIT CINTRON**
   Reading, PA 24-0 (22)
7. **JAWAID KHALIQ**
   England 23-1-1 (13)
8. **CARLOS BALDOMIR**
   Argentina 40-9-6 (12)
9. **TEDDY REID**
   Adelphi, MD 22-6-1 (16)
10. **COSME RIVERA**
    Los Angeles, CA 27-7-2 (19)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: KOSTYA TSZYU
Australia 31-1 (25)

1. **ARTURO GATTI**
   Jersey City, NJ 38-6 (29)
2. **VIVIAN HARRIS**
   Brooklyn, NY 25-1-1 (17)
3. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Grand Rapids, MI 32-0 (21)
4. **SHARMBA MITCHELL**
   Washington, D.C. 55-4 (31)
5. **MIGUEL COTTO**
   Puerto Rico 21-0 (17)
6. **RICKY HATTON**
   England 37-0 (27)
7. **DeMARCUS CORLEY**
   Washington, D.C. 28-3-1 (16)
8. **LOVEMORE NDOU**
   Australia 39-7-1 (25)
9. **JESSE JAMES LEIJA**
   San Antonio, TX 47-6-2 (19)
10. **OKTAY URKAL**
    Germany 34-3 (10)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: JOSE LUIS CASTILLO
Mexico 50-6-1 (45)

1. **DIEGO CORRALES**
   Sacramento, CA 39-2 (32)
2. **JUAN LAZCANO**
   El Paso, TX 33-3-1 (25)
3. **JULIO DIAZ**
   Coachella, CA 30-2 (22)
4. **JUAN DIAZ**
   Houston, TX 26-0 (12)
5. **ACELINO FREITAS**
   Brazil 35-1 (31)
6. **JAVIER JAUREGUI**
   Mexico 48-11-2 (34)
7. **ARTUR GRIGORIAN**
   Uzbekistan 37-1 (23)
8. **JULIEN LORCY**
   France 56-4-2 (41)
9. **LAKVA SIM**
   Mongolia 19-4-1 (16)
10. **ISAAC HLATSHWAYO**
    South Africa 20-0 (9)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
   Mexico 59-4 (41)
2. **ERIK MORALES**
   Mexico 47-2 (34)
3. **JOEL CASAMAYOR**
   Miami, FL 31-2 (19)
4. **JESUS CHAVEZ**
   Mexico 40-3 (28)
5. **YODSANAN NANTHACHAI**
   Thailand 43-2-1 (35)
6. **CARLOS HERNANDEZ**
   Bellflower, CA 40-4-1 (24)
7. **JORGE BARRIOS**
   Argentina 42-2-1 (30)
8. **CASSIUS BALOYI**
   South Africa 30-1 (16)
9. **MIKE ANCHONDO**
   La Puente, CA 25-0 (18)
10. **ROBBIE PEDEN**
    Australia 24-2 (13)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **KATSUSHIGE KAWASHIMA**
   Japan 27-3 (18)
2. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
   Venezuela 25-0 (24)
3. **LUIS PEREZ**
   Nicaragua 22-1 (14)
4. **IVAN HERNANDEZ**
   Mexico 19-0-1 (13)
5. **MARK JOHNSON**
   Washington, D.C. 44-4 (28)
6. **MASAMORI TOKUYAMA**
   North Korea 30-3-1 (8)
7. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
   Mexico 29-1-1 (23)
8. **MARTIN CASTILLO**
   Mexico 26-1 (16)
9. **FELIX MACHADO**
   Venezuela 22-5-1 (11)
10. **JOSE NAVARRO**
    Los Angeles, CA 21-0 (9)

FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
   Thailand 54-2 (28)
2. **LORENZO PARRA**
   Venezuela 24-0 (17)
3. **IRENE PACHECO**
   Colombia 29-0 (22)
4. **MZUKISI SIKALI**
   South Africa 29-4-2 (17)
5. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
   Argentina 17-0-2 (11)
6. **ROSENDO ALVAREZ**
   Nicaragua 33-2-2 (21)
7. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
   France 17-0 (6)
8. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
   Australia 21-0 (16)
9. **HUSSEIN HUSSEIN**
   Australia 25-1 (19)
10. **LUIS MALDONADO**
    Mexico 30-0 (22)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JORGE ARCE**
   Mexico 37-3-1 (27)
2. **VICTOR BURGOS**
   Mexico 37-13-3 (22)
3. **BEIBIS MENDOZA**
   Colombia 29-3 (23)
4. **NELSON DIEPPA**
   Puerto Rico 21-1-2 (12)
5. **PICHIT SIRIWAT**
   Thailand 30-2 (14)
6. **FAHLAN SAKKREERIN**
   Thailand 50-4-2 (20)
7. **JOSE AGUIRRE**
   Mexico 33-2-1 (20)
8. **KERMIN GUARDIA**
   Colombia 35-4 (21)
9. **ULISES SOLIS**
   Mexico 14-1 (10)
10. **ROBERTO VASQUEZ**
    Panama 17-1 (14)

STRAWWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **YUTAKA NIIDA**
   Japan 17-1-3 (8)
2. **EAGLE KYOWA**
   Japan 13-0 (5)
3. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
   Indonesia 49-7-3 (21)
4. **DANIEL REYES**
   Colombia 34-2-1 (29)
5. **IVAN CALDERON**
   Puerto Rico 21-0 (4)
6. **JUAN LANDAETA**
   Venezuela 15-3-1 (13)
7. **CHANA PORPAOIN**
   Thailand 50-2-3 (17)
8. **ISAAC BUSTOS**
   Mexico 22-6-3 (11)
9. **NOEL ARAMBULET**
   Venezuela 20-3-1 (10)
10. **RODEL MAYOL**
    Philippines 19-0 (15)

RYAN OUT LOUD

By Jeff Ryan

KOST EFFECTIVE

Maybe it's Kostya Tszyu, and not Neil Young, who proved once and for all that rust never sleeps. If rust can look that good, why in the world did we ever bother getting our cars undercoated or spend all those hours with wire brushes in our hands, scraping the rust off the railings and fence posts we were preparing to paint? After two surgeries and 22 months of inactivity, here we were expecting Tszyu to move about as smoothly as the Tin Man before Dorothy found his oil can. Instead, he swung his ax and Sharmba Mitchell's title hopes were split in half like a dry log.

In many ways, Tszyu's magnificent performance made about as much sense as matching a Russian who relocated to Australia with a kid from Washington, D.C., in a hockey rink in Arizona. On paper, this looked like it might be a long evening for the junior welterweight king. On canvas, however, it became just another abbreviated outing for a guy who has heard scorecards read just twice on the last 18 nights he's vaulted over the top rope and entered his beloved combat zone.

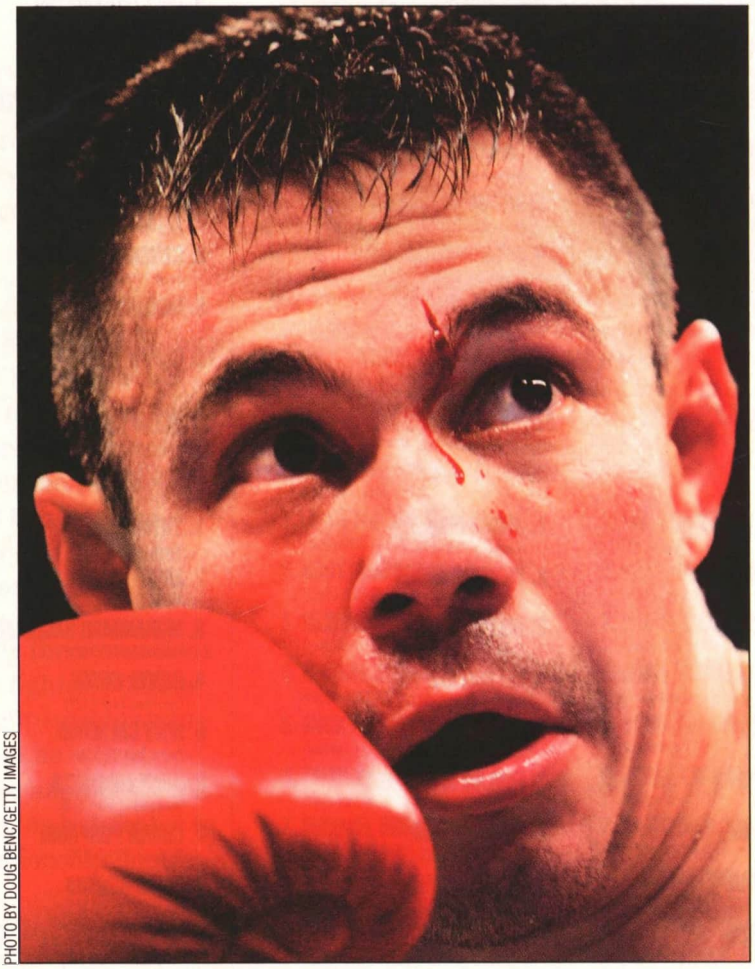


PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Tszyu's not the type to let a nasty cut to get in the way of victory

Far be it from me to doubt Tszyu's toughness, resilience, and, of course, paralyzing power. Hell, it's a good bet that he'd be able to deck the Statue of Liberty with a straight right if he caught her on the point of the chin, no matter what his birth certificate, medical reports, or press clippings happened to say at that moment in time. Still, if you're going to attempt to retain your crown against a slick, quick southpaw like Mitchell, a guy who fought you on even terms nearly four years earlier before his knee gave out in the middle rounds, there are a few things you don't do if you want to inspire confidence in your fans and those pundits who make it a habit of never picking against you.

For starters, you don't give the impression, as Tszyu did at times pre-surgery, that you've been ducking Mitchell. Nor do you finally agree to a rematch without first fighting a tune-up. That Tszyu didn't dent some tomato can en route to Arizona was particularly surprising when you consider that he was facing the second-best 140-pounder in the world after having hit nothing but sparring partners, heavybags, and the nurse-call button on the side of his hospital bed for almost two years. (Since Tszyu's last outing, a stoppage of Jesse James Leija on

January 19, 2003, Mitchell had waged war five times.) Not to mention that Tszyu had to be wondering how his body would hold up in real combat after surgery on his Achilles tendon *and* a partially ruptured tendon in his shoulder. Either injury is career-threatening in any professional sport.

If inspiring confidence is your mission, it's also not a good idea to agree to fight in a 22 x 22 ring, a playing surface that would make an Olympian training for the 1,500-meter run smile, let alone a mover like Mitchell. And getting cut above the left eye by a headbutt early in the bout isn't advised, either.

But if you're Kostya Tszyu, it's now clear to all of us, conventional wisdom is about as useful in the heat of battle as gloves with their laces missing. This time, Tszyu utilized a sneaky left hook to soften Mitchell for the lethal right hand. (If that's not proof that Tszyu's left shoulder is completely healed, nothing is.) He wasted very little movement or punches, showed that 22 months away from the trenches hadn't diminished his killer instinct a bit, and vanquished the one trash-talking nuisance who stood between him and lucrative matchups with some marquee junior welters.

PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Mitchell went down four times in less than three rounds

To those of us who believe Tszyu is the most exciting performer in the sport, the destruction of Mitchell was as unsettling as it was impressive, though, for it reminded us of what it really was that we were missing for the past two years and what we're probably not going to see for a whole lot longer.

Tszyu turned 35 in September (old for a 140-pounder), parts of his body are held together with sutures and prayer, and he fights with the kind of furious style that can burn out a fighter overnight, no matter how active or inactive he has been. After dispatching Mitchell, Tszyu was matter-of-fact in his assessment of the potential rivals in his future and his odds of squaring off with them. But what we'd like to see is that same sense of urgency when it comes to schedule-making that Tszyu feels when he hears a bell and sees an exposed jaw moving in his direction.

Tszyu and his Tszyu-keepers need a fight with Floyd Mayweather to secure the Russian's legacy. The choice of Arturo Gatti wouldn't exactly be sloppy seconds, although the canvas might be a little sloppy during that matchup until the blood was mopped up. Worst-case scenario: Tszyu defends against either of two unbeaten hotshots, Miguel Cotto or Ricky Hatton. Let's hope, however, that talk of Tszyu-Vivian Harris dies. That's a win that would mean as much to Tszyu as a victory over Vivian Vance, and simply delay his shootout with someone who matters. And there have already been enough delays.

Look around at today's game. The most entertaining showmen—and we're talking about explosive kayo artists and action warriors, not clowns with glittery trunks and big talk that they can't back up—are turning gray. Besides Tszyu, there's Bernard Hopkins, who blew out 40 candles on January 15, Mike Tyson, who's 38, shot, and seemingly disinterested in fighting, and Gatti, who's a very old 32 and is forever one bad beating away from being finished. Where's the new breed of hard-hitting, badass finishers who are willing to take on anybody? In our dreams, that's where.

It was nice to see Tszyu turn conventional wisdom on its cauliflower ear and live to thrill another day. For me, there's no greater sense of anticipation these days than when Tszyu leaves his dressing room. The smirk is firmly in place. The little pigtail is bouncing up and down on the back of his head and he proceeds to the ring. Then he starts mouthing the words, Ashlee Simpson-style, to the theme song that blares from the arena sound system: "I'm as strong as rock inside, and I'm gonna knock you out tonight!"

A short time later, naturally, comes the separation of a rival from the feeling in his legs. And Tszyu, a little man with a weapon of mass destruction hidden beneath his handwraps, being lifted in the air in celebration.

Next time he does something that seems to make no sense, and gets everyone wondering if maybe this is the night he finally falls apart, don't expect to find me in the camp of the doubters. Tszyu has made me a permanent believer, no matter how big the ring is, how long he's been off, or how risky the choice of foe might be. That's right; from now on consider me a card-carrying member of the Tszyu-Illogical Society. ■

DIGGING DEEP

By Ivan Goldman

THE SEARCH FOR HORIZONTAL MEANINGS

The fight world will buzz for years about the jarring events of two back-to-back Saturday nights last September. Icons Oscar De La Hoya and Roy Jones abruptly lost fights in the horizontal position, both, weirdly, in the ninth round. What did it all mean? For two opposite conclusions, just ask me and retired California promoter Don Fraser. We agreed to disagree.

"I thought Oscar was a very good actor," Fraser said. "He quit. The punch didn't look that hard." Whereas Jones, he pointed out, was truly unconscious, unable to continue.

But I'm convinced Bernard Hopkins' bodyshot paralyzed De La Hoya. Equally important, against an opponent who was stronger in every facet of the game, Oscar was still out there to win—no matter what trouble he ran into. He was cautious, but aggressive in spurts, not backing up and throwing in bunches. At middleweight, he didn't really have the punch to hurt Hopkins, but he worried him anyway by standing his ground and using what he had.

Jones, encountering the determined Glen Johnson, retreated to the ropes within moments of the opening bell, which is where Johnson had him all night. Did Jones' abilities evaporate so quickly that he was unable to compete with Johnson? Not really.

Jones lost because he didn't *want* to fight Johnson. He wanted to destroy him easily, as he'd destroyed so many opponents throughout his career. In fact, Jones outclassed everybody until he got to Antonio Tarver, who lost by decision in their first bout and put Jones to sleep in the rematch.

We've all seen instances when evenly matched fighters respond to these situations with a precisely opposite reaction—Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales, Micky Ward and Emanuel (Burton) Augustus, Micky Ward and Arturo Gatti. Heck, you see it in four-rounders where the purses are $500. Fighters figure, "Okay, this other guy is just as good, so I'll just have to win through the force of my will."

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Was De La Hoya kayoed or did he quit?

Is Jones a coward? Of course not. But when he realized the unheralded Johnson was now an equal, he became confused and demoralized. His body language and the sorry look on his face told us the story. Without an edge, Jones didn't want to be there.

De La Hoya has been a prize fighter with athletic abilities. Jones was always an athlete who engaged in prize fights. At least that's my take on it, and as Fraser knows too well, the writer always gets the last word.

GERIATRIC FIGHTERS: Hopkins, practically unnoticed by the general public, turned out to be a legend, one fight at a time. I see only one problem with his remarkable, well-earned success. Because he's 39, he no doubt will be cited by other oldsters who either continue fighting well past their prime or, like Riddick Bowe, un-retire. If you're not sure what

"un-retirement" is, it's similar to the "un-birthdays" celebrated at the Mad Hatter's tea party.

In the past, over-the-hill fighters with potbellies and scar tissue on their scar tissue pointed out how George Foreman famously regained the heavyweight championship after 20 years. Now they can also liken themselves to old man Hopkins. Trouble is, Hopkins shouldn't be seen as an example for us Earthlings. Watch him in the corner between those late rounds. He's still not breathing hard. Earthbound science can't explain it. E.T. can.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Is Hopkins from another planet?

And speaking of ghastly un-retirements that shouldn't happen, note just where the already-punchy Bowe went for a boxing license. A "tribal" commission in Oklahoma—in other words, a rubber-stamp gang that's beyond the reach of state governments and put together by the casino managers.

The very existence of these casino commissions undermines ethical practices. For example, New Jersey refused to give Don King a license to promote more fights there until he answers its questions. No problem. When King wants to put together an East Coast card, he can slide up to Connecticut. If its state commission won't look the other way, he can choose between two big, fight-hungry casinos on Indian reservations. Both have their own commissions.

These casino commissions that answer to no one are dangerous—even more dangerous than some of our weakest state commissions. Letting them oversee boxing safety is like letting a taxidermist perform open-heart surgery.

THE NEXT TOMMY HEARNS?: Sources tell me a 168-pounder has been getting the best of light heavyweight slugger Julio Gonzalez in their sparring sessions at the La Habra Gym outside Los Angeles. These sources—unlike the whackos and bunco artists who convinced the Bush Administration that Saddam Hussein had giant stockpiles of nerve gas, weaponized smallpox, and nuclear paraphernalia—are reliable.

The super middleweight, Librado Andrade, appears to be a good man to practice with, but the wrong guy to fight. He just might put some zip in a division that's been in the doldrums since Roy Jones moved up to light heavy in 1996. Not all the fans know him yet, but you can bet the other super middles are aware of Andrade, 20-0 (14). The first time he lands something halfway solid, you see the realization in his opponent's eyes: "Man, what kind of dude am I up against?"

In three consecutive bouts, the lanky Andrade, 26, knocked Willie Stewart, 20-1 (11), out of the ring, destroyed a very capable and determined Tito Mendoza, dispatching him to the canvas three times, and then polished off tough Vitali Kopytko in the second round. I didn't see the Stewart massacre, but I can tell you Mendoza and Kopytko looked like they were struck by a logging chain. Can't you visualize British promoter Frank Warren trying to pit his prized Joe Calzaghe against Andrade? Sure, right after monkeys fly out of Warren's butt.

Yes, here I am going off on a tangent again, but how many times has Warren spun the same old yarn that he's going to put his stars, Calzaghe, Ricky Hatton, and Scott Harrison, in against top opponents? It must drive British reporters to drink. Actually, I've met a fair number of British reporters, and clearly something has driven them to drink.

Anyway, if you haven't checked out Andrade, do so before he goes to pay-per-view. It's worth mentioning that he's promoted by Golden Boy. At least three fighters (not Andrade, so far) have recently jumped off the Golden Boy express. Managers complain the corporation acts too much like a typically unresponsive Hollywood agency and not enough like a promoter dedicated to their needs. Perhaps. But Golden Boy has been a welcome addition to the boxing biz, putting on plenty of cards that otherwise wouldn't exist.

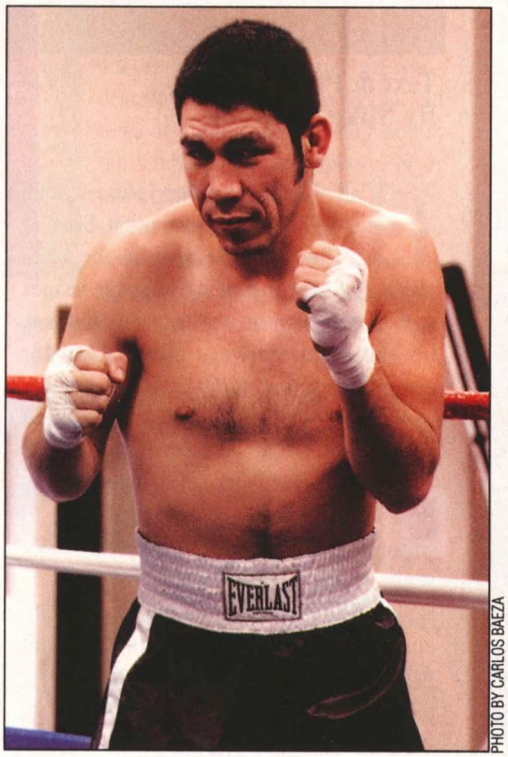


PHOTO BY CARLOS BAEZA

Is Andrade the new Tommy Hearns?

HUSTLING THE FANS: ESPN, a division of the $52-billion Disney mouse-opoly, actually staged a smiley press conference announcing the startup of its own pay-per-view shows—as though that's something we're all supposed to celebrate. There's nothing unusual about corporations or political hacks putting lipstick on a pig. But the sheer tonnage of cynical fakery involved this time was truly impressive. This was a mugger telling his victims they're getting the deal of a lifetime.

ROOT OF THE SPAT: What's the real reason Don King's on-and-off relationship with HBO is off again? "They've got guys in there who are trained to keep Don King off the cameras," King complained. In King's mind, hell is a place that has no cameras or microphones pointed at him. ■

THE NEW ALHAMBRA

IF YOU GO

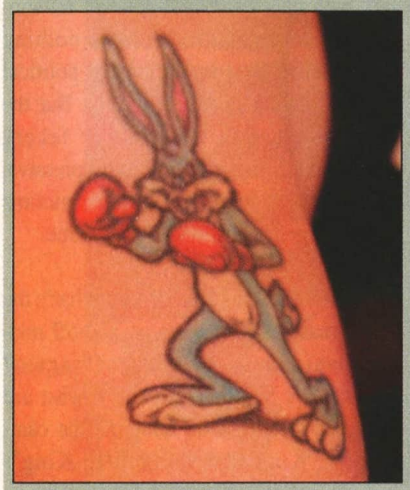
Location: 7 Ritner Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19148

Directions: From the south: Take I-95 into Philadelphia to Exit 20 (Columbus Boulevard) toward Washington Avenue. Turn right off the ramp onto Columbus Boulevard. Go south for about two minutes and make a slight right onto South Swanson Street. The New Alhambra's white exterior can be seen on the right about a half-mile later where Swanson meets Ritner Street.

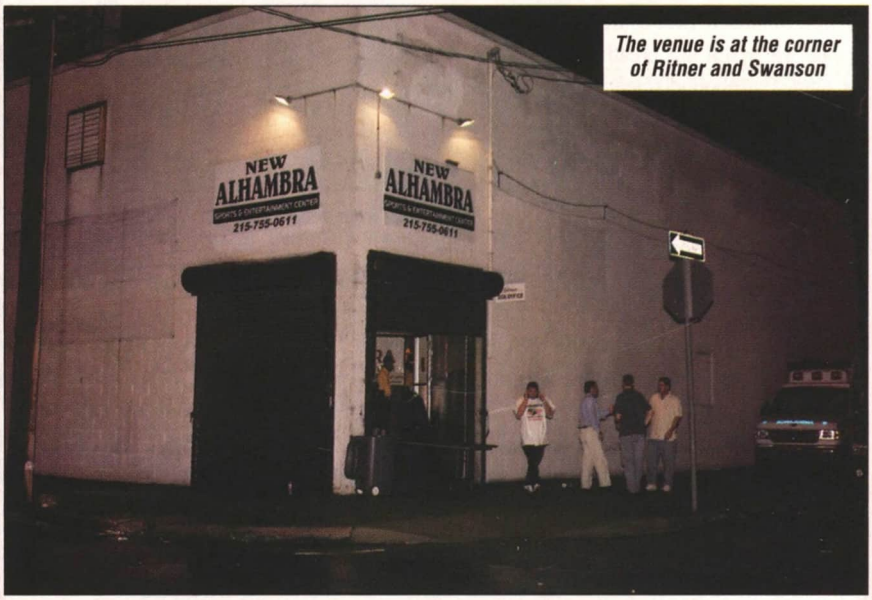
Tickets: Phone Peltz Promotions at 215-765-0922 for tickets priced at $45 and $50. Fights normally start at 7:00 p.m.

Who to look out for: There are always a number of Philadelphia-area fighters in the crowd, most of whom will be delighted to chat. Also look for former middleweight contender Michael Olajide, who provides color commentary for the CN8 broadcasts.

Advice to greenhorns: Use a good street map to get there, since the slight turn onto Swanson comes up quickly and can be easily missed among the similarly industrial-looking turnoffs from Columbus Boulevard. The New Alhambra is one of those places that may be tough to find the first time, but once discovered, you won't have that problem again. There's a parking lot located in the back of the building. If you watch from the mid-ring balcony, don't get too close to the television cameras. The equipment and its operators are sensitive to vibrations, and the cameramen will be only too happy to remind you of that fact.



Chucky T's boxing bunny tattoo



The venue is at the corner of Ritner and Swanson

Text & Photos
By Mike Greenhill

Hall of Fame promoter J Russell Peltz is a Philadelphia institution. Starting at the Blue Horizon in the late-1960s and later expanding to larger venues such as the Spectrum and numerous casinos, his shows have always been known for competitive action. It didn't matter whether it was Bennie Briscoe, Matthew Saad Muhammad, or a novice making his pro debut, Peltz matched them tough. Now, Peltz and co-promoter Joe Hand hope to continue the tradition at the latest Philly venue, the New Alhambra.

Located in South Philadelphia, the fight club is named in honor of the original Alhambra, a popular South Philly movie theater, where Jimmy Riggio promoted in the late-1950s and early-'60s. Those bouts showcased top names such as Joey Giardello, Stanley "Kitten" Hayward, Leotis Martin, Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, and Eddie Perkins.

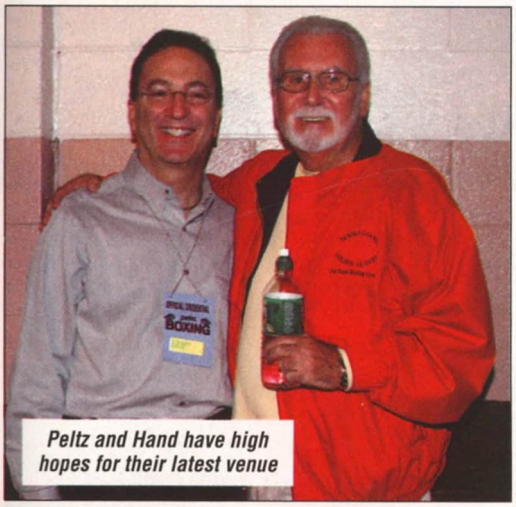
In its current reincarnation, the Alhambra in located in a small industrial area between the Delaware River and a residential neighborhood. The blockhouse-looking building features an enthusiastic local crowd and exciting bouts that belie its relatively unassuming interior.

Though not yet stocked with performers at the level of Giardello, Carter, Perkins, etc., the New Alhambra is nonetheless an enjoyable experience, with crowd-pleasing fighters such as Miguel Figueroa, Omar Sheika, Almazbek Kodzoev, Chucky T, John Poore, and Michael "No Joke" Stewart providing the thrills.

"Make good matches and they'll keep coming back," said Peltz.

The interior is one big square room with two small balconies, one in the corner

There's not a bad seat in the cozy confines of the New Alhambra

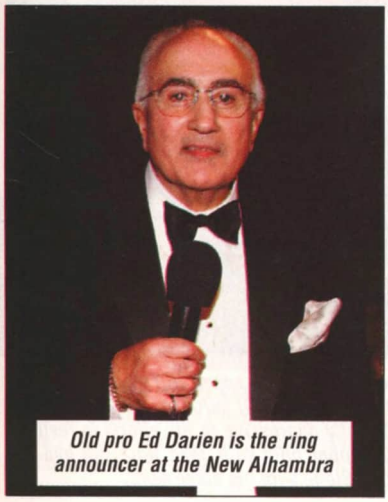

Peltz and Hand have high hopes for their latest venue

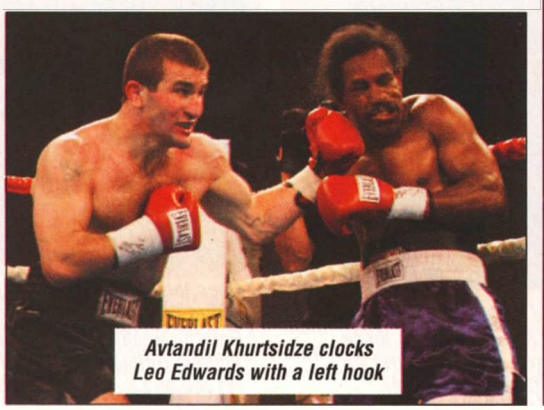
above the main entrance and the other on a walled-in platform, where fans can drink their beverages and watch the fights while sharing space with the nearby camera crew of regional cable channel CN8.

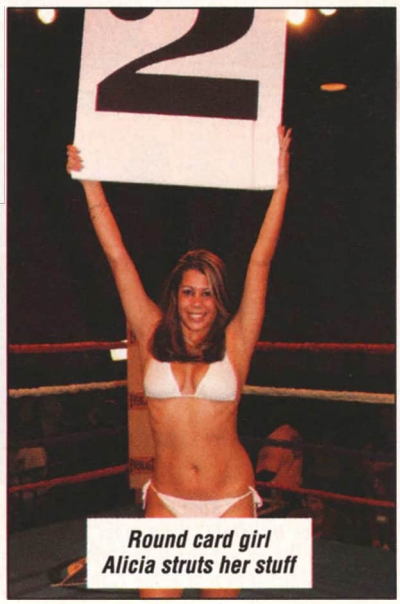
At ground level, the New Alhambra, which can accommodate 1,200 fans, has a Spartan nondescript interior of gray walls and rows of folding chairs, which add to the smoker-like atmosphere. Near one corner of the room is a concession counter. Food and drink are very reasonably priced, as are the tickets. Many of the regulars seem to know each other, adding to the intimacy of the fight cards.

The New Alhambra shows are progressing well under Peltz and Hand's guidance and the size of the crowds is increasing with each card. It's a perfect venue for either developing new talent or allowing more established fighters to retool, rebuild, or just stay sharp between major contests.

You always hear old-timers bemoaning the passing of neighborhood fight clubs, but now there's a new one in the heart of South Philly. Let's hope the second coming of the Alhambra will be around for years to come. ■


Old pro Ed Darien is the ring announcer at the New Alhambra


Avtandil Khurtsidze clocks Leo Edwards with a left hook



Round card girl Alicia struts her stuff

CAMERA CLICKS

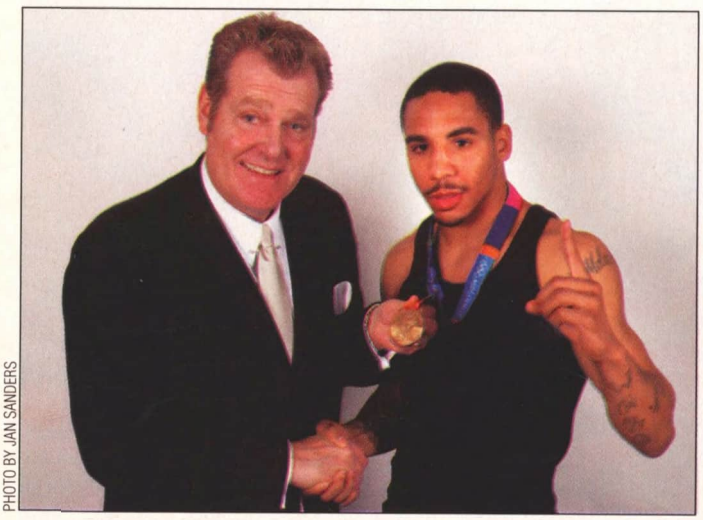


PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Gold 'n Goose: Promoter Dan Goossen grabs hold of the Olympic medal belonging to his latest acquisition, light heavyweight Andre Ward. By the time you read this, Ward will have become the second gold medalist ever to turn pro on HBO, and Goossen also promoted the first, David Reid. So far, there are no signs of a droopy eyelid on Ward.

PHOTO BY BOWERS/GETTY IMAGES

We're not sure Joe Frazier is the one we should be calling "Smokin'" in this picture. The legendary former heavyweight champ wrapped his arm around Miss USA Shandi Finnessey at the Hearts for Hope Gala in New York in November. Something tells us Frazier's heart might have been hoping just a little.

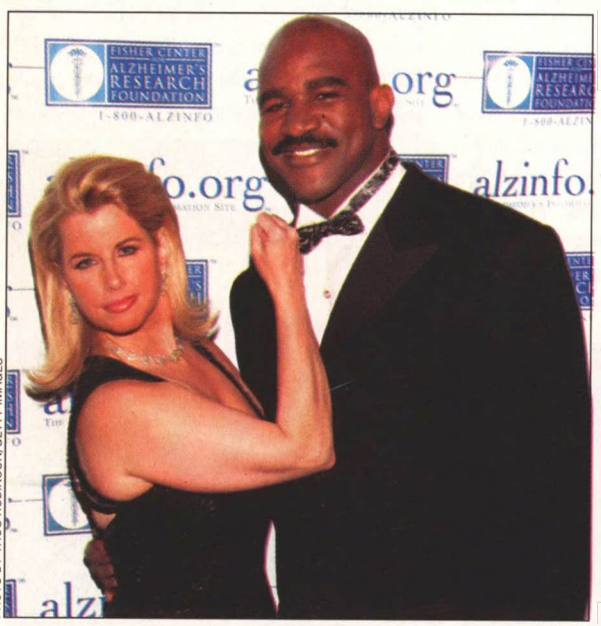


PHOTO BY THOS ROBINSON/GETTY IMAGES

Is this how low Don King now has to go to find an opponent suitable for Evander Holyfield? Like most everyone Holyfield fights these days, Fox News anchor Rita Cosby managed to get off first on Holyfield when they met at the Fisher Center Gala in November.

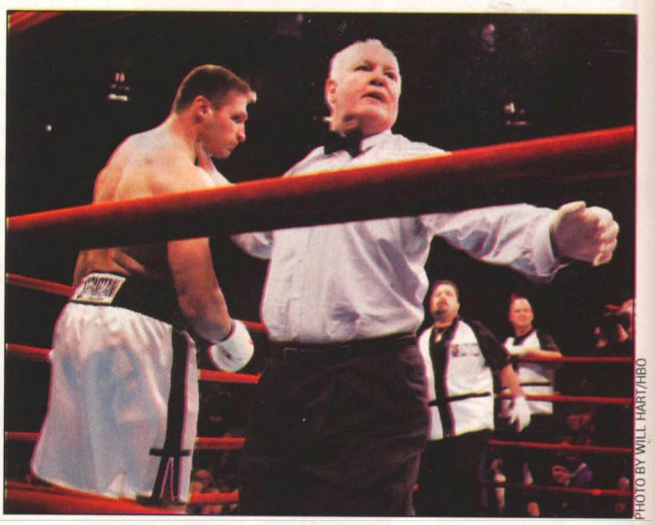


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Does this photo remind anyone else of the scene in Full Metal Jacket *where Private Pyle leans forward so the drill sergeant can choke him? Referee Randy Neumann got pretty aggressive in his efforts to restrain Andrew Golota during his November fight with John Ruiz; too bad the ref couldn't quite reach Norman Stone with his other hand.*

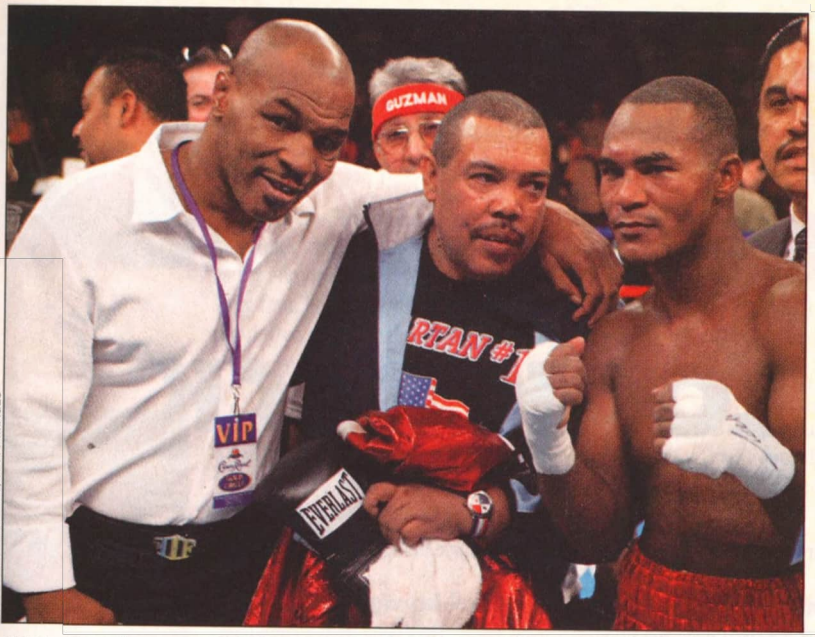


PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

"Little Tyson" ... meet Big Tyson. Joan Guzman, the 122-pounder with the heavyweight nickname, is separated from his namesake by just a couple of feet and a cornerman. After the Dominican defeated Joe Morales in November, Tyson entered the ring to congratulate Guzman—and to ask him whether the Dominican Republic was anywhere near Bolivian.

PHOTO BY ALEXANDER SIBAJA/GETTY IMAGES

Actress Eva Longoria, best known as the married woman who has an affair with her young Latino gardener on Desperate Housewives, *has found another young Latino who works with his hands to cozy up to. Longoria was present at the Oscar De La Hoya Foundation's Eighth Annual Evening of Champions Awards in Beverly Hills—and no, co-star Nicolette Sheridan and her bath towel were not in attendance.*

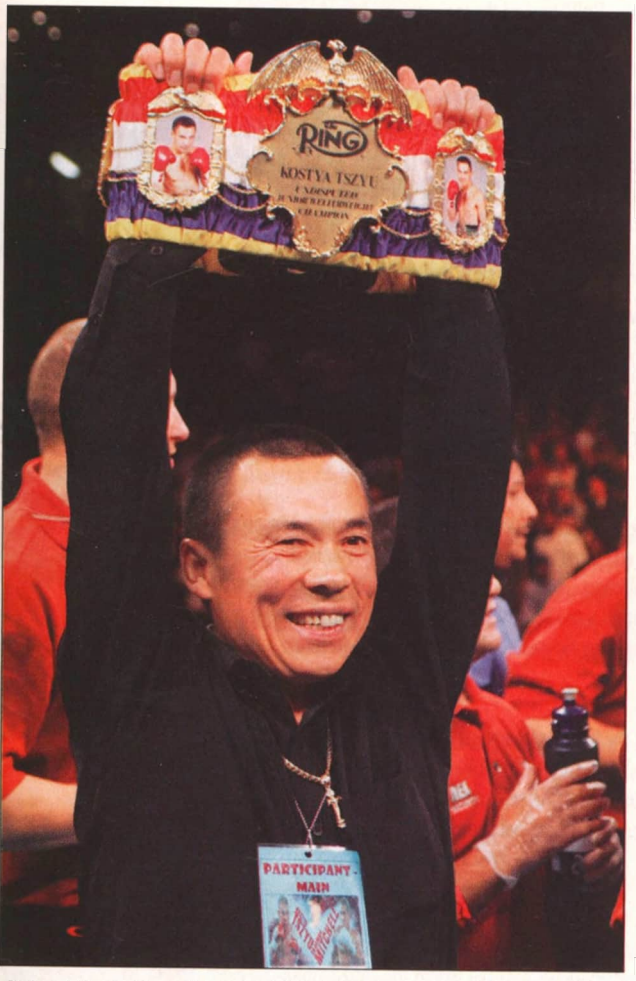
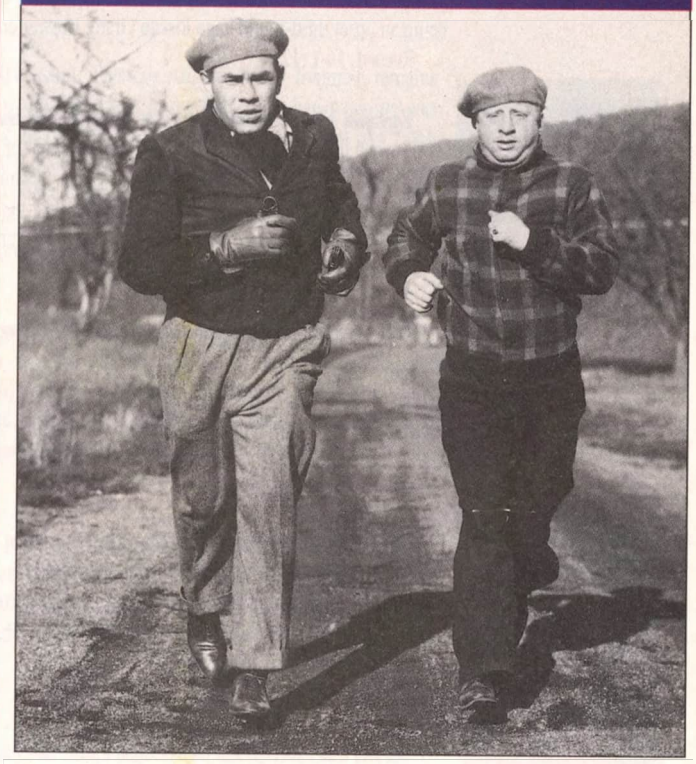


PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

At least Boris Tszyu knows which belt matters. The father of world junior welterweight champion Kostya Tszyu proudly displays his son's Ring *belt following King Kostya's demolition of number-one contender Sharmba Mitchell. We'd like to think that if this photo were full-length, you'd see Tszyu's alphabet trinkets being trampled under Boris' feet.*

NOSTALGIA CORNER



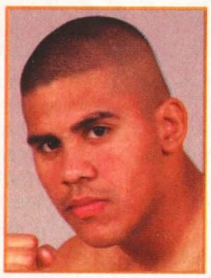
How far have training methods progressed since the 1930s? Well, for one thing, fighters don't do their roadwork in nice slacks and dress shoes anymore. That's Spanish heavyweight Paulino Uzcudun and his trainer, Whitey Bimstein, preparing for a Madison Square Garden showdown with Joe Louis in December '35. Uzcudun went on to lose by fourth-round kayo, but who knows how history might have changed if he'd had proper running attire.

NEW FACES

A LOOK BACK

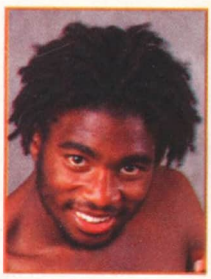
Compiled by Joe Santoliquito

What have our most recent "New Faces" been doing since being featured in THE RING? An update:



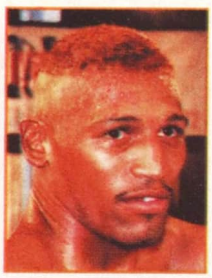
Juan Diaz, lightweight (January 2003 issue): Diaz has made the biggest leap of this group, winning the WBA lightweight belt and going 9-0 (5) since appearing as a "New Face." He's gone from a kid whom fans remember for crying in the ring back in September '01 to a rugged competitor who fought brilliantly in winning the WBA strap against Lakva Sim on July 17, 2004. Increased exposure on Showtime, HBO, and ESPN and his great storyline (the first high school graduate in his family and a pre-law college student when he's not fighting) have pushed the 21-year-old "Baby Bull" toward the mainstream.

Record: 26-0 (12)



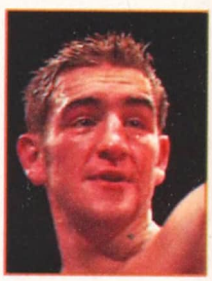
Anthony Thompson, welterweight (February 2003 issue): Top Rank threw a lot of money and effort into promoting "The Messenger," with Bob Arum even flying cross-country to Philadelphia to announce the signing of the hot prospect. But all the hyperbole seems to have been for nothing so far, as little progress has been made. Thompson is 10-1 (8) since appearing in THE RING, the most noteworthy result being an upset third-round kayo loss to Grady Brewer on February 28, 2004.

Record: 16-1 (12)



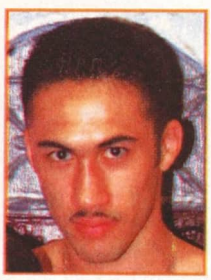
Epifanio Mendoza, middleweight (March 2003 issue): Mendoza threw a minor tremor into the boxing world when he scored a stunning first-round knockout of Tokunbo Olajide on October 13, 2002, earning himself "New Face" status. But in his next three fights, "Diamante" took a sudden tumble, going 0-2-1. He built his record back up, winning four straight, but then lost again, against Troy Rowland on November 19, 2004. Mendoza is a huge puncher, but it's clear now that he's far too one-dimensional to become a serious contender.

Record: 20-3-1 (19)



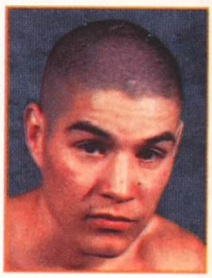
Alex Arthur, junior lightweight (April 2003 issue): "Amazing" looked amazing right after appearing in THE RING, tallying three straight knockout victories and emerging as one of the game's hottest up-and-comers. But Arthur was deflated when he met veteran Michael Gomez on October 25, 2003, getting stopped in a thrilling five-round slugfest. Arthur came back to build a modest two-fight win streak as of press time, and the heart he showed in losing to Gomez suggests the young Scottish fighter may yet have a future.

Record: 18-1 (16)



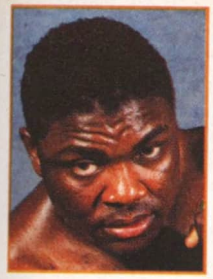
Jeffrey Resto, welterweight (May 2003 issue): At the time Resto appeared in THE RING, he was undefeated and commented that he loved watching the New York Yankees on TV. Resto will have more time to do just that if he continues spiraling down at his current pace. After winning his first 17 fights, he quit against Carlos Maussa in six rounds on September 26, 2003, then lost a unanimous decision to prospect Michael Warrick in an entertaining fight in June '04.

Record: 17-2 (11)



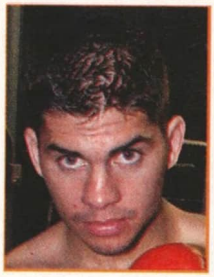
Steven Luevano, junior lightweight (June 2003 issue): This southpaw could be the dark horse of the group. He's gone 11-0 (5) since appearing in THE RING and continues to make strides toward becoming a contender. The rangy 5'7" Luevano appears fully healed from two broken bones in his left hand. He's relied on his elusive defensive skills and boxing ability to remain undefeated. Luevano is being moved well. He stepped up to 10-round fights in late-2004, winning unanimous decisions over Cristian Favela and Aldo Valtierra.

Record: 26-0 (12)



Samuel Peter, heavyweight (August 2003 issue): The Nigerian power hitter's punching potency has ebbed as his competition level has increased. Seven of Peter's initial 10 victories were first-round kayos, but three of his last four fights went seven rounds or more. But he was still undefeated as of press time, with 10-round decisions over Charles Shufford and Jovo Pudar in late-'04. A decent test against Jeremy Williams on Showtime was looming for this frequently exciting heavyweight.

Record: 20-0 (17)



Steve Molitor, junior featherweight (September 2003 issue): The Canadian southpaw fought just four times since appearing in THE RING. Though he remains undefeated, Molitor's competition level has hardly improved. However, something much more serious loomed over Molitor that could take his attention away from boxing: His older brother, Jeremy, was scheduled to stand trial in late-2004, charged with second-degree murder in the stabbing death of his former girlfriend.

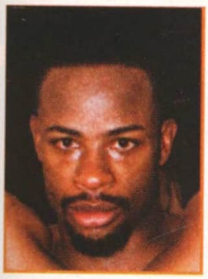
Record: 19-0 (6)

Arturo Morales, welterweight (October 2003 issue): Morales has done the least of this group. Since appearing in THE RING, he's fought only once, struggling to a six-round draw against Jessie Feliciano on September 12, 2003. Morales broke his right leg in March and needed six months to recover. He's scheduled to fight again in January.

Record: 14-0-1 (4)

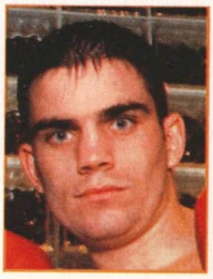
Yusaf Mack, super middleweight (November 2003 issue): Mack is 6-0-1 since appearing as a "New Face," with an inconsistency to his performances. In his last fight, he struggled mightily in scoring an eight-round stoppage win over shopworn veteran Shannon Miller. Before that, he scored an impressive second-round knockout over Donnell Wiggins. And prior to that, Mack settled for an eight-round draw against fellow Philadelphian Randy Griffin.

Record: 17-0-2 (11)



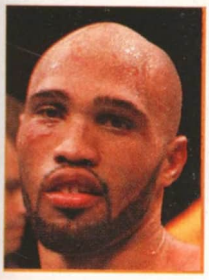
Rasheem Brown, junior middleweight (December 2003 issue): After "The Untouchable" began his career with 14 straight wins, including a fun back-and-forth brawl on national TV against Monroe Brooks, he suddenly hit the wall. He dropped an eight-round unanimous decision to Aslanbek Kodzoev on May 1, 2004, then three months later suffered another setback, losing to Jose Spearman via eight-round split decision. Brown retired after the Spearman loss, choosing, perhaps wisely, to focus on his full-time gig as a medical technician.

Record: 14-2 (12)



Bernard Dunne, featherweight (January 2004 issue): The Los Angeles-based Irishman remains undefeated, but has struggled and has failed to show the same pop in his fists as he had when he was pegged as a "New Face" by THE RING. Though he's gone 6-0 since being featured, Dunne's last five victories were all by decision. His win on August 19, 2004, over Adrian Valdez was especially trying, and not everyone agreed with the judges' verdict. Dunne was once touted by his former promoter, Hall of Famer Sugar Ray Leonard, as the hottest prospect to come out of Ireland since Barry McGuigan. Dunne has a long way to go to live up to comparisons to "The Clones Cyclone."

Record: 14-0 (8)

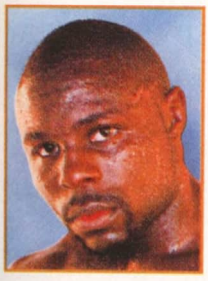


Ishe Smith, welterweight (February 2004 issue): Smith took a hiatus of sorts to become a reality TV star when he was cast in Sylvester Stallone's boxing-based show, *The Contender*. "Sugar Shay" fought just once officially in '04, scoring the most significant victory over his career—a narrow decision over hard-hitting veteran Randall Bailey. Smith was reduced to tears following the difficult test, but the bottom line was that he emerged with a win over a respected fighter.

Record: 14-0 (7)

Jesus Gonzales, junior middleweight (March 2004 issue): The southpaw just turned 20 in October and he's been moving at a steady pace, fighting three times since appearing in THE RING. Top Rank and manager Cameron Dunkin have time and are moving Gonzales gradually into eight-round fights. If Gonzales keeps up his current rate, he could be ready for 10-rounders by the summer of '05. Dunkin is hoping to get Gonzales 10 fights in the coming year.

Record: 11-0 (8)



Daniel Edouard, middleweight (April 2004 issue): "The Haitian Sensation" has shown that he indeed has a sensational side. His record only reads 2-0-2 since his "New Face" appearance, but his progress has been noteworthy nevertheless. He combats a porous defense with an all-out offense. Back-to-back 10-round draws against Dorian Beaupierre seemed to signify that Edouard was going nowhere fast, but a dramatic fourth-round kayo of previously undefeated Willie Gibbs on ESPN2 has made Edouard a hot fighter entering 2005.

Record: 16-0-2 (9)

Pretty Good For A "Washed-Up" Fighter

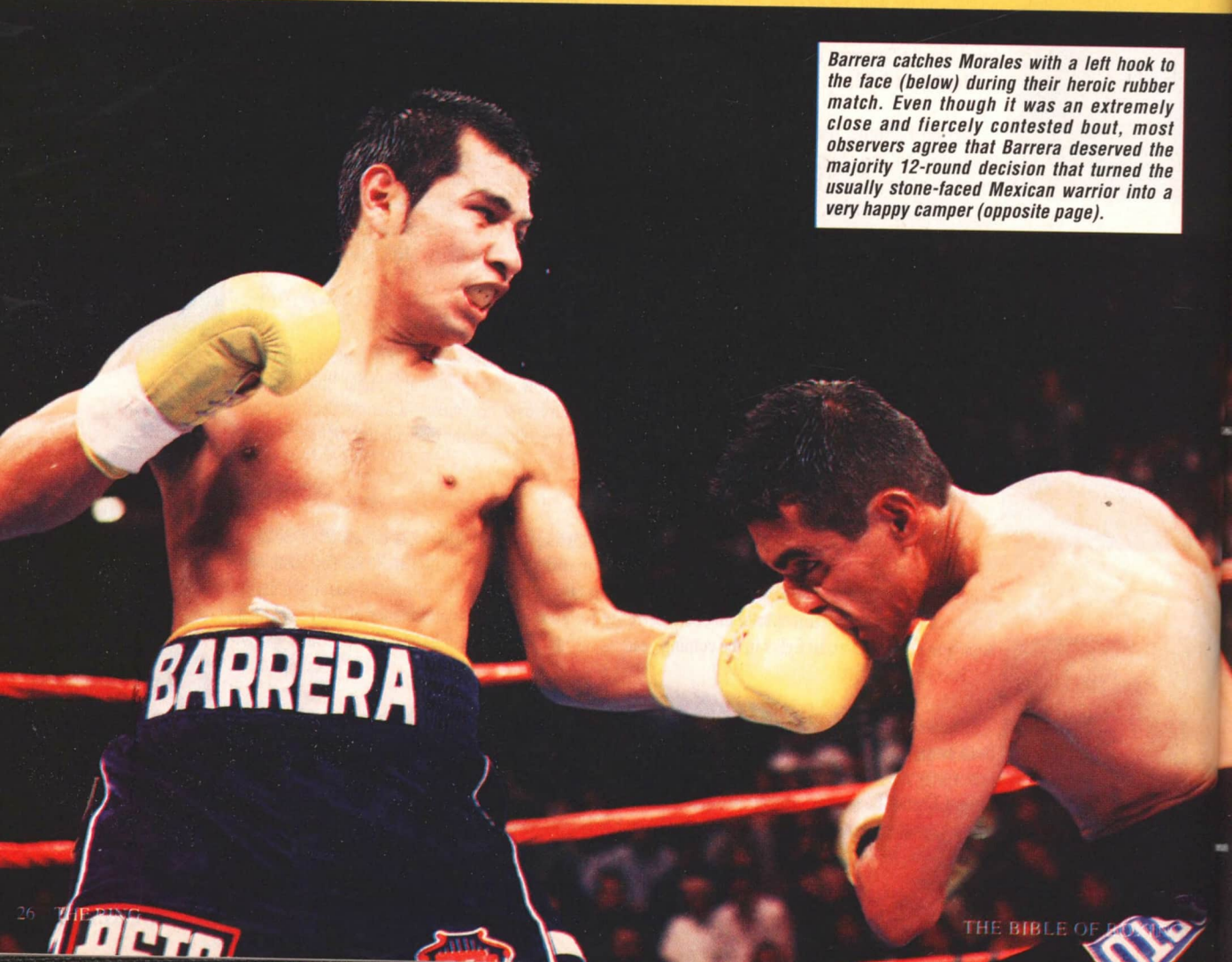
BARRERA BEATS MORALES IN A CLASSIC

By Ivan Goldman
PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

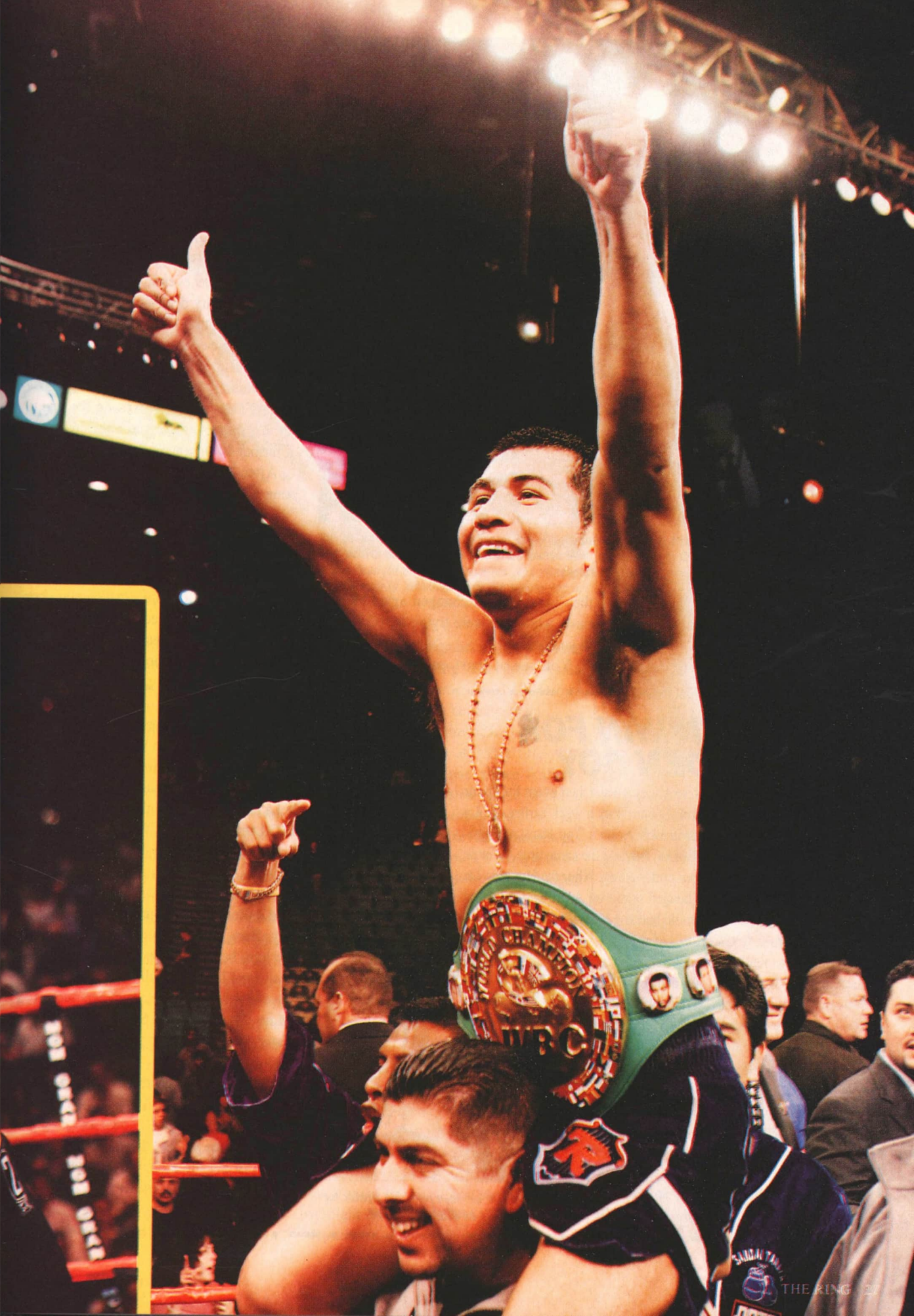
Marco Antonio Barrera staked everything on winning the tiebreaker over arch-enemy Erik Morales. But Barrera also had a goal that transcended victory. He wanted, as he explained later, to demonstrate "I'm not just an ordinary fighter, as people were saying." In one of the greatest bouts ever fought, he accomplished both missions. And though it wasn't his purpose, he also added to the legacy of his opponent.

Trying to score a fight between Barrera, 30, and Morales, 28, is like optical surgery, requiring tremendous concentration, will, and precision. Events unfold brutally, exactly, and artfully at blinding speed. Just as you form an opinion, you change it again and then again—all in microseconds. It's hell on the judges, but bliss to the fans.

So much is going on it's almost like trying to watch several fights at once—a punch flies, a counterpunch flies back.



Barrera catches Morales with a left hook to the face (below) during their heroic rubber match. Even though it was an extremely close and fiercely contested bout, most observers agree that Barrera deserved the majority 12-round decision that turned the usually stone-faced Mexican warrior into a very happy camper (opposite page).


WBC

Barrera sprinted to an early lead with a vigorous opening-round attack that featured plenty of left hooks. Barrera, fighting for the 63rd time as a pro, was obsessed with proving that the critics and oddsmakers who thought he was washed up were wrong.

Often two brilliant combinations are executed simultaneously. Retreats are sometimes real, sometimes traps. Was that a foul? Too late to know for sure because they've already exchanged again several times while you were trying to roll it back in your mind.

You see at least one man, possibly both, as clearly finished; there's no more to give. Then one, through the force of his will, generates a new source of power. The other meets it head-on with his own transcendent rejuvenation. It's a baffling ebb and flow that goes way past any realistic expectations of what fighters might risk or achieve.

But when it was all over, most fair-minded witnesses agreed that, close as it was, Barrera, 59-4 (41), was victorious. The margin was ever so thin, yet tangible, and the majority decision in his favor correct. It's tempting to say that it's unfair to declare a winner and a loser in such a great contest. But both fighters wanted us to judge their performances. It's why they fought. They put their lives on the line to get this thing settled. And after 36 rounds of furious battle it was; Barrera won.

After Morales of Tijuana won at 122 pounds in 2000 and Barrera of Mexico City took it at 126 pounds two years later, most mortal combatants would have been tempted to leave it like that. Yes, it was widely believed that each man got the wrong decision, but still, justice was done and the score was tied. So why spin the wheel again? But these weren't ordinary mortals and this was no ordinary rivalry.

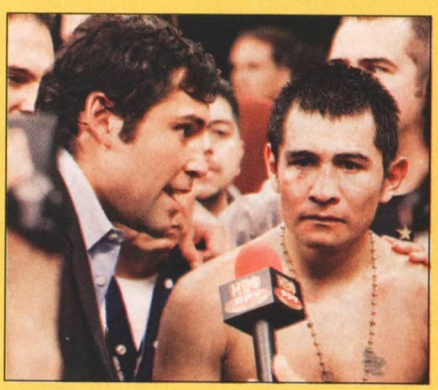
GOLDEN WIN FOR GOLDEN BOY

Barrera's victory over Morales was a watershed event for Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions. Only a week earlier, De La Hoya announced he would drop Bob Arum's Top Rank and promote his own fights through Golden Boy. At the same time, he stole Bernard Hopkins right out from under Arum. After the Hopkins-De La Hoya fight, Hopkins had heaped praise on Arum and it looked almost certain that Hopkins would become a Top Rank fighter.

Oscar's company got off to a shaky start. Barrera, its first really big-name fighter, was flattened by Manny Pacquiao in his first Golden Boy event. That was in November 2003. Exactly a year later, the fledgling company was in Fat City. In addition to Barrera, De La Hoya, and middleweight champ Hopkins, it had junior feather titleholder Oscar Larios and up-and comers such as junior featherweight Daniel Ponce De Leon and heavy-fisted super middleweight Librado Andrade.

De La Hoya made Hopkins an officer in the company and gave him a piece of the action. Hopkins' job is to recruit Eastern fighters, mostly African-American, into the fold while Oscar handles the West Coast-Latino end. That could be a winning combination. Hopkins might even recruit heavyweight prospects and eventually challenge Don King's hold over the division. De La Hoya is already tight with kingmaker HBO, producing all its HBO Latino fight cards. With Top Rank, he co-promoted Barrera-Morales III for HBO Pay-Per-View, so he's already inside the inner sanctum.

Old hands Arum and King are in their 70s. Arum has already announced his stepson Todd duBoef would begin handling day-to-day affairs. Arum has a solid crew working for him, but if he steps aside, they might look for lifeboats. Both Arum and King have to retire sometime. Promoters such as Main Events, Gary Shaw, Goossen-Tutor—and Golden Boy—eagerly wait to step in.



Promoter De La Hoya joins his fighter for HBO's postfight interview

But as retired promoter Don Fraser points out, "King and Arum are gamblers. They'll take a chance." If they lose a million on some event, "they'll come back. They've got the money. Some of these other guys might react differently."

—IG

The action was so fast and furious that just as soon as you thought one of the fighters was starting to dominate, the other would rally back. Morales was especially effective with his power-laden right hand that repeatedly smashed into Barrera's head.

Their first meeting—an instant classic—was unquestionably one of the greatest fights ever seen, 12 rounds of unbelievably brutal, toe-to-toe action. The sequel, more technical in nature, was a fine contest between two masters. The third fight was even *better* than the first, creating instant lore—a fable that was unrealistically real.

Barrera, a clear underdog before Bout III, widely considered a shot fighter, shocked the fight world with a performance that defied what we used to think were the limits of possibility. Barrera's victory over a bigger Morales at the top of his game punctuated the entire series with a magical finish.

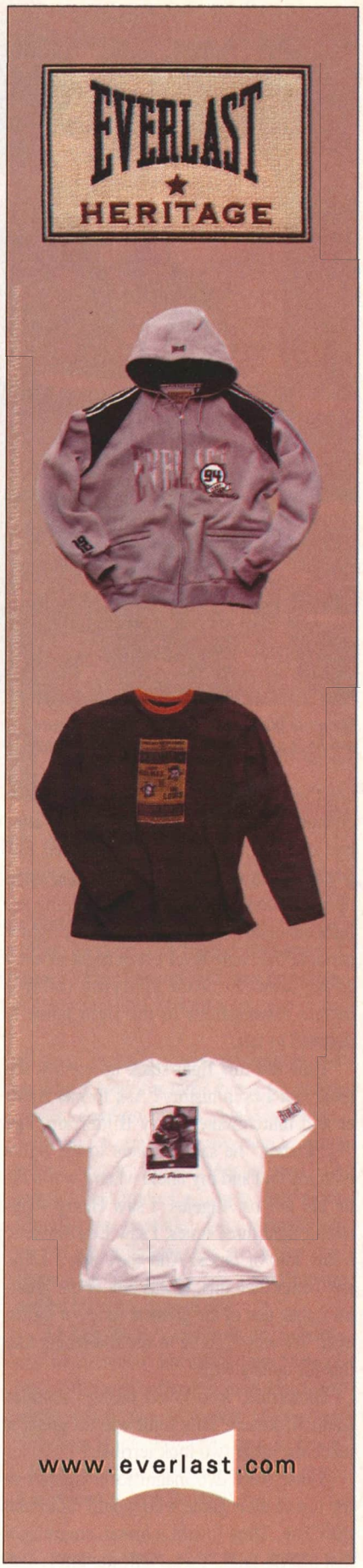
The way Barrera and Morales match up, each fighter's skills and strengths run straight into the teeth of the other's. Morales, 47-2 (34), has speed, strength, and the huge right hand. Barrera owns the superior Mexican left hook to the body and a killer jab. Barrera is more of a boxer, but Morales is a slugger who can box.

"I think Marco's got his groove back," tough, savvy Paulie Ayala said after Barrera knocked him down three times on the way to a kayo last June. But most experts disagreed. They said Ayala was finished anyway and that Barrera's kayo loss to Manny Pacquiao in his previous fight was more telling. That loss, Ayala insisted, "was just an off night." Barrera said the same, but few believed them.

At 130 pounds, the deadly Morales already had won two alphabet titles and Barrera had never gone above featherweight. Titlist Morales chose Winner gloves. Barrera complained they made his wrists swell. But the Nevada commission turned down Team Barrera's request to let each fighter select his own brand. Morales was 130, Barrera 129½ at the weigh-in. The night of the fight, they were 143 and 132, respectively.

"That extra weight doesn't always help," pointed out longtime promoter Don Elbaum. It might mean Morales had been too dehydrated, that it would slow him down or cause fatigue. But that's not how gamblers saw it. The odds grew to 5-2 against Barrera.

In these, the first years of the 21st century, the microchip revolution gives us cell phones, the Internet, and other computer-assisted processes, propelling us into a new way of thinking. Instant messaging, overnight delivery, pizza in at your door in 30 minutes, and tuneups while you wait



Earlier in his career, Barrera was considered pretty much a pure slugger, but that's changed over the years, and he is now a skilled boxer who makes excellent use of his left jab.

are the rule. Everyone expects constant change. Part of this thinking means after one bad night a fighter is considered finished. But boxing is not part of this hurry-up revolution. Its methods and training are little changed from 50 years ago. A fighter is not at the same level every night or even every moment. And applying today's instant assumptions to the fight game is doomed to fail.

How did this fight stack up against the great matches in history? Ask former fighter and matchmaker Jerry Bilderrain, age 79. "Listen," he said, "I went to the fights with my dad and my uncle when I was a little kid in Los Angeles. I saw Henry Armstrong fight three times, I saw Lou Ambers. I saw lots of tapes. And they don't come any better than this. It was one of the greatest fights, one of the greatest series of fights, ever. We're not going to see something like this for quite a while."

Bilderrain, who loved Barrera-Morales I and II, joked "This fight was so great, it made the other two look terrible."

These were two magnificent fighters at the top of their game who would rather die than lose. They fought a brutal, smart fight that had no lulls. It was, unfortunately, also dirty. When one man ducked low, he could almost count on a blow to the back of the head. Elbows? Late hits? Low blows? All part of proceedings. Nevada referee Kenny Bayless did his best to keep control; mostly he let them fight, which was the right thing to do. Most of the fouls were no more dangerous than what the fighters did to each other legally.

"Bayless did a fantastic job," said Elbaum, who'd bet on Morales. "I thought Barrera was over the hill. But to see a fight that great, I don't mind losing a bet."

How did it measure against other great trilogies of history? "It might not stand up to Rocky Graziano-Tony Zale," Elbaum said. "Now there's a legend."

The Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier trilogy, great as it was, included a dud in Fight II. The more recent Micky Ward-Arturo Gatti trilogy was just as hard-fought, but good as they are, Gatti and Ward aren't as technically proficient as Morales and Barrera.

Naming some other legendary series of fights, Elbaum also pointed to Carmen Basilio-Sugar Ray Robinson and Basilio-Tony DeMarco. Those were rugged, super-charged two-fight rivalries featuring plenty of knockdowns and extraterrestrial endurance. Three of the four contests were THE RING's Fight of the Year.

More than 11,000 fans were inside the arena of the MGM Grand in Las Vegas for Barrera-Morales. That was thousands short of a sell-out. Tickets were priced reasonably, from $50 to $600. The hotel's rooms were almost sold out, which is exceptional on the normally dead Thanksgiving weekend. But except for the Latino community and hard-core fight fans of every color, most Americans weren't even aware of the fight or who the fighters were. After all, they weren't heavyweights.

Many rounds were close, and with all the action, there was no round in which one fighter didn't do something effective. Round one was Barrera's and round two Morales' on all cards. Then it got closer. Morales would complain later that he felt stiff in the early rounds. It seemed he was mostly looking to land his monster right hand. And he did land it. But their will was so strong, their rivalry so bitter, neither fighter would go down from blows that might have felled them had they been thrown by another fighter.

Barrera spent more time on the ropes, but many times he won exchanges there. By round four Barrera's left uppercut was a big factor. Combinations were the rule. The fighters fought inside and outside. Always they fought. No rest. In round five, Barrera landed a massive hook to the body and charged in behind it with a good combination. Everybody gave him the round.

In round six, Morales landed a giant left hook to the head of Barrera, who, for a few seconds, looked in trouble. But his heart brought him back and he actually managed to win the round on all three cards.

In round seven, Barrera paid for landing a vicious jab when Morales landed a punishing right over the top. Morales, coming on, made exactly the same trade in round eight. He won both rounds on all cards.

Bayless sternly warned Barrera in round nine for punching to the back of Morales' head. Barrera bulled Morales back to the ropes, landing a combination before the bell and after the bell. Bayless warned him again. Barrera won rounds nine and 10 on all three cards.

Although better known as a right-hand puncher, Morales can also do damage with his left hook. In the sixth round, he momentarily appeared to have Barrera in a bit of trouble after connecting with a big hook.

In round 11, Morales had his jab working and his left eye was nearly closed. Both landed big shots. Both staggered from exhaustion, then found enough strength to snap out their punches furiously. It will surely be a candidate for Round of the Year. Two judges gave it to Morales, one scored it 10-10.

Round 12 saw both fighters stagger with exhaustion, then come back effectively. They were still punching when Bayless broke them at the ending bell. It was close, but it was Morales' round.

Jerry Roth of Nevada saw it 115-113 and Larry O'Connell of England 115-114, both for Barrera. Paul Smith of Nevada scored it 114-114. THE RING scored it 115-114 Barrera.

Afterward, Morales, busted up and wearing sunglasses, was dejected and disappointed, but refused to make excuses.

The victory "means the world to me," said Barrera, whose face was only somewhat bruised.

Those who saw what they did the night of November 27, 2004, will never forget it. ■

Ivan Goldman is THE RING's West Coast correspondent.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BARRERA?

At the postfight news conference, Barrera refused to be drawn into a discussion of what he'd do now that he's back on top. He indicated he had already thought about it, but elected to take some R&R before giving a hard look at his future.

Barrera, above all, will consider the mark he will make on history as one of the greatest of Mexican champions. That means he must lean toward avenging that 2003 kayo by Manny Pacquiao. Barrera has a history of seeking out those who dared to beat him. After his poor outing against Junior Jones, he went right back into the ring with him. Although he lost again, at the time Barrera hadn't developed the boxing skills to give Jones a different look. And of course, he wouldn't take defeat for an answer against Morales.

Will Barrera try Pacquiao again now that he's bested Morales?

But though Pacquiao himself is game as they come, negotiations with his handlers Rod Nazario and Murad Muhammad may not be so easy. Whatever Team Barrera says, and no matter what fight he takes next, assume the Filipino slugger is on Barrera's mind big-time.

Clearly he can still get down to 126 pounds comfortably, but now he has a title at 130. Who's there for him? Not a lot of big names. Acelino Freitas, Joel Casmayor, and Diego Corrales all moved up to lightweight, which is where Morales said he's going. That makes a fourth fight with Morales less possible. Also, virtually all the top junior lightweights are bigger than Barrera, so it's not certain he will even defend his newly gained title.

At 126, Barrera can look up, in addition to Pacquiao, Mexico's Juan Manuel Marquez and Scotland's Scott Harrison, among others. Also, it wouldn't be terribly surprising if junior feathers such as Oscar Larios and Israel Vazquez elected to go up four pounds to face Barrera.

—IG

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF A NEAR-PERFECT FIGHTER

How Kostya Tszyu Mastered The Sweet Science

By Gavin Evans

Some knockouts linger long after the event, even if you're merely a passive observer. That crack of fist on jaw, the bounce of the head on the floor, and those long moments of motionlessness have a way of sticking in your mind. Kostya Tszyu has left many such knockouts in the memory vaults of boxing fans, including his most recent, a terrifyingly easy kayo of number-one contender Sharmba Mitchell in the third round of their long-awaited rematch.

After suffering a gash over his left eye in the first round, thanks to an accidental clash of heads, Tszyu, 31-1 (25) with 1 no-contest, took Mitchell apart with a clinical display of punching prowess, as a crowd of more than 8,000 at the Glendale Arena in Phoenix, Arizona, and Showtime's cable audience watched in awe. Tszyu's southpaw challenger, who many favored to lift the 140-pound crown, was floored once in the second and three more times in the third before referee Raul Caiz Sr. stopped the massacre at the 2:48 mark.

The crushing defeat of Mitchell, 55-4 (31), was another in a growing string of notable knockouts on Tszyu's resume, but perhaps none was quite as emphatic as his sixth-round knockout of Jan Bergman in Newcastle, Australia, more than eight years ago. It was both a prelude to greatness and a warning to all of those who came after Bergman.

At the time, watching Tszyu on a television screen offered the temptation that he might just be ever so slightly over-rated. After all, he was a bit on the short side and fought too upright with his legs too wide apart. There was not much head movement, he was too open to right hands, and anyway, how good could any fighter be after only 17 pro bouts? Even up close he hardly seemed to justify his "Thunder From Down Under" nickname. Tszyu was small, not particularly muscular, and with his impish face, quaint way of speaking English, ready smile, and funny little pigtail, he looked anything but imposing.

Meanwhile, the big hitting, sharp boxing, 5'11" Bergman was flying high. He was 32-0 (24), the IBF's top contender, coached by Kenny Adams with Vince Phillips as his chief sparring partner. Bergman looked wonderful in training and held it together for the first four rounds. Then the real fighting commenced.

With each round, Tszyu closed the gap, and by the fifth he'd found his range. From then on, his mastery of the middle distance was complete, with quick, solid jabs and straight, hard rights thudding home. And when their bodies touched, it was clear that Tszyu enjoyed a huge advantage in sheer physical strength.

A perfect left hook connected and Bergman was down for the first time in his career. After Bergman beat the count, Tszyu closed in and fired a three-punch combination, the last of the punches the most brutal right cross many witnesses had ever seen. It took the South African three minutes to regain consciousness.

"He was just so strong that after a few rounds he started getting through, and then he caught me and it was over," Bergman

PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

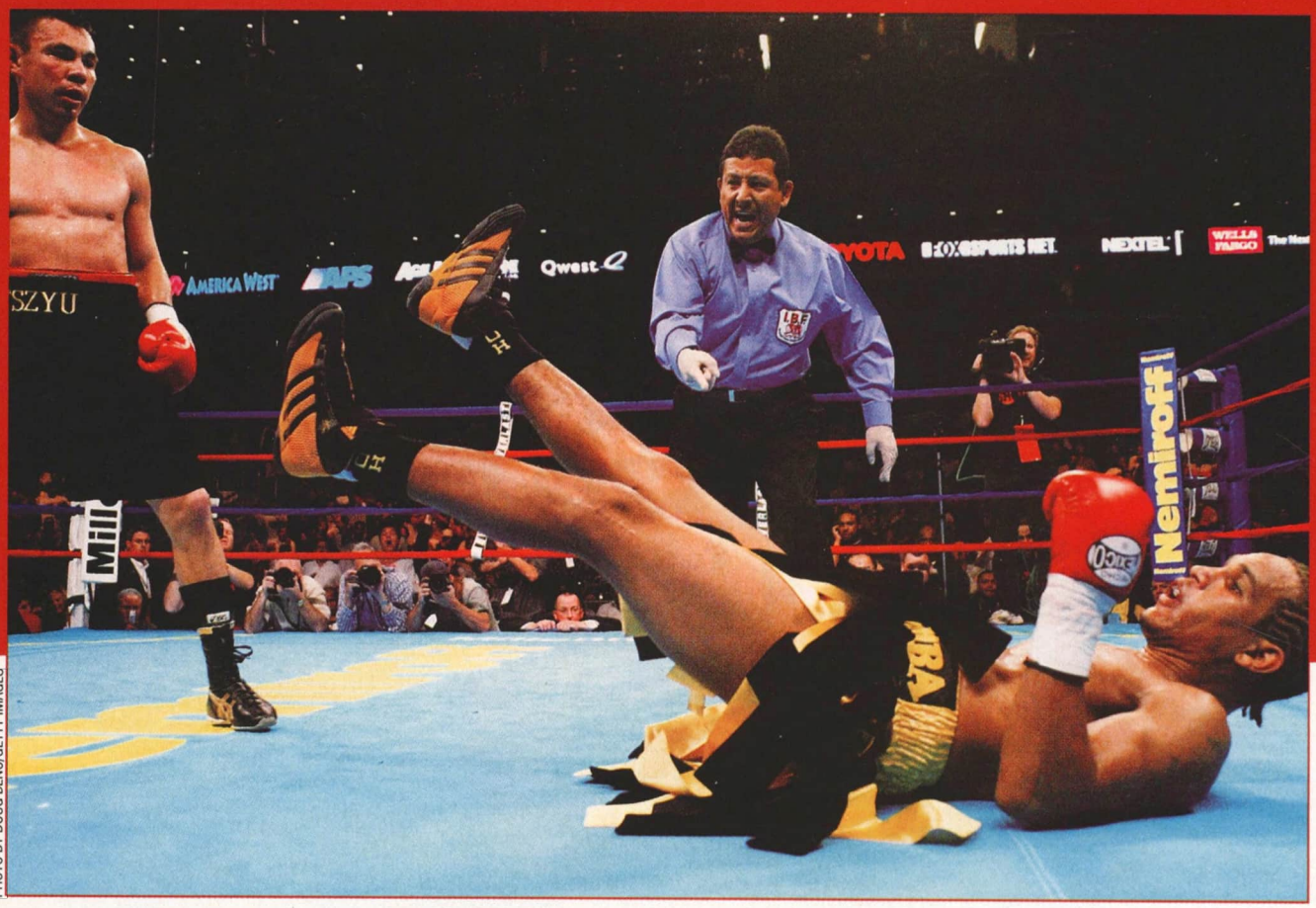


PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Challenger Sharmba Mitchell crashes down on his back for one of the four knockdowns he suffered in his third-round kayo loss to Tszyu on November 6 in Phoenix, Arizona. Most experts were expecting a close fight and possibly a new champion, but Tszyu was simply devastating.

said after recovering his senses. Sadly, Bergman was never the same fighter again, both his confidence and punch resistance gone.

For anyone who watched Tszyu's display against Bergman, the case seemed to be closed. This product of the Soviet system would surely see off Oscar De La Hoya and all the rest, and go on to become an all-time great. But the future was delayed.

Eight months later, Tszyu defended the title in the United States for the first time, supposedly a routine, getting-to-know-you assignment against Bergman's old sparring partner, Phillips. But The Thunder From Down Under went down with a bad case of prefight hubris. He expected an easy night against the 33-year-old recovering drug addict who had lost his previous fight, so for once in his life Tszyu didn't train properly and had trouble making weight.

Instead of the tired veteran he anticipated, Tszyu found himself swapping bombs with a talented and highly focused boxer-puncher in the finest condition of his career. Phillips conceded the early rounds, absorbed some huge digs, but somehow he survived until his superior conditioning gave him the edge. "Cool Vince" dropped the champion in the seventh and then in round 10 unloaded punch after punch until Tszyu sagged onto the ropes and had to be rescued from further punishment.

Today, 7½ years later, Phillips is quick to emphasize his victim's range of assets, not least his power.

"No doubt about it, he is definitely the hardest puncher I've fought," said Phillips. "I can tell you, I've faced some really big hitters—Ike Quartey, Vernon Forrest, Micky Ward—but Tszyu hit the hardest. Quartey was a really heavy-handed welterweight, but Tszyu hit harder than him. You think Ricky Hatton is strong and hard-hitting? Let me tell you he has no more than 25 percent of Tszyu's power and nothing like his strength."

Tszyu has clearly improved since losing to Phillips in 1997, a result of greater experience, application—and learning some hard lessons.

"What changed after the Phillips fight is that I become a professional athlete," Tszyu explained. "Some of my team went, and from that day I changed everything in my preparation, everything."

Tszyu is fitter now and, alarmingly, even stronger than before. He has developed into a more versatile boxer, one who blends the incessant aggression of his early professional days with the more defensive style of his years as one of Russia's top amateurs. Up against the big-hitting Ben Tackie, Tszyu turned boxer, winning every round by jabbing, moving, countering, blocking, and parrying. But against slick boxers like Mitchell and Zab Judah, he is the stalker, cutting off the ring and then cracking home that deadly, perfectly straight, and extraordinarily accurate right.

This might sound churlish after the way he disposed of Mitchell, but for the sake of balance, it is worth pointing out that the 35-year-old world junior welterweight champion is by no means the perfect boxer. He still doesn't move his head much, he's not the fastest mover, and he takes a while to settle into his fighting rhythm. Moreover,

he still gets caught by counter rights, most notably by Judah and Diosbelys Hurtado, both in the first. He's also become prone to injury and cuts, and although he has a good chin, he's been dropped three times, twice by Hurtado and once by Phillips.

But the things Tszyu does well, he does brilliantly. Watch closely and you'll find a great deal of subtlety about his work. Aside from his physical strength and one of the finest right hands in boxing history, he has several more key weapons in his arsenal, including a fine jab, an excellent left hook, and a strong uppercut in each hand. He's also a superb bodypuncher.

Furthermore, Tszyu is one of the most accomplished counterpunchers in the game, with the rare ability to counter while on the attack. His accuracy, timing, and judgment of distance are impeccable. His lack of speed is mitigated by his skill in cutting off the ring and his lack of head movement by his high guard and his adroit blocking and parrying.

Tszyu is a thinking boxer, who can adjust tactics as a fight progresses. His preferred range is the middle distance—not too far away so that he can't reach and find the target for his heavy, straight punches, but not so tight that he smothers his work. But whenever things get really dicey, he invariably comes out on top, partly because of his uppercuts and short hooks to the body, but also because there is no junior welterweight in the world (and probably no welterweight either) who can match his strength. In addition, since

PHOTOS BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Vince Phillips is all smiles (top right) at the postfight press conference following his 1997 TKO victory over Tszyu (above) in Atlantic City. Even though he handed Tszyu his only pro loss, "Cool Vince" says that Tszyu is the hardest puncher he's ever fought.

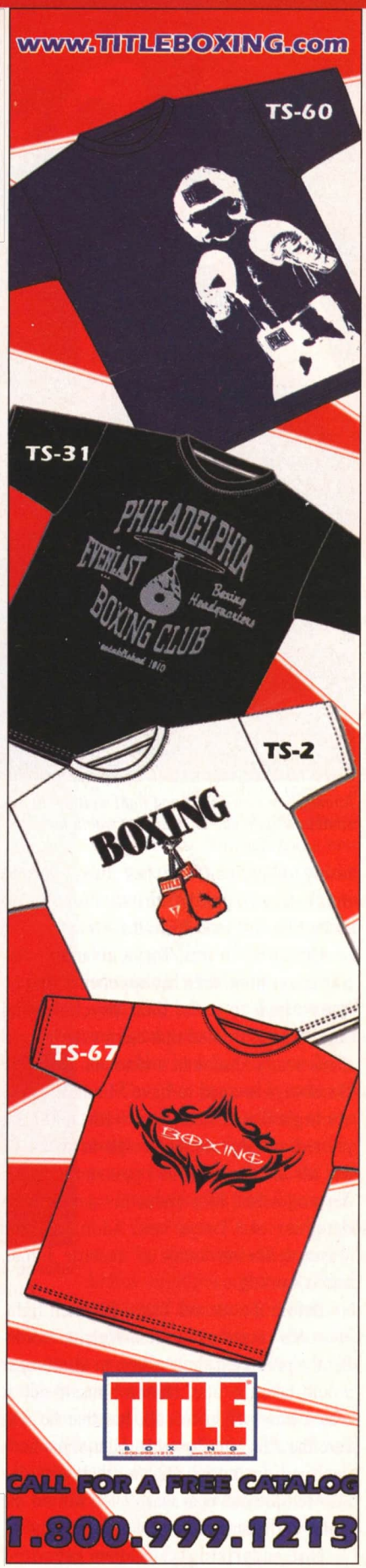


PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Although he can adjust and fight well on the inside, Tszyu does his best work at middle distance. Prior to the rematch, a lot of folks thought Mitchell's southpaw style and slick boxing would be Tszyu's downfall. But once the bell rang, Tszyu was unstoppable.

losing to Phillips, Tszyu has always been in magnificent condition, so there is no chance he will fade down the stretch.

On top of all this, Tszyu invariably has a stronger mind than his opponents, and he knows how to upset their psychological equilibrium. Behind that calm exterior and those ready smiles is a heart of tungsten. He always seemed to have Mitchell's psychological measure, and with Judah he gained an edge at the weigh-in when he put his arm around his opponent's shoulder and asked him about his newly born daughter. As Tszyu later admitted, this was a deliberate tactic to unsettle Judah, and it worked.

Before the second Tszyu-Mitchell fight, Hatton's promoter, Frank Warren, confidently predicted the American challenger would take the title. Hatton himself said it was a tough fight to call, but that he was sure the Australia-based Russian must have declined during his 22-month layoff. He also felt the old man wasn't too hot on the inside and that his left hook was lacking.

Not surprisingly, Hatton was less grudging in his respect after the event.

"To fight like that after two years out with injuries proved without a doubt that Kostya is the man to beat," admitted Hatton. "He has a murderous right hand, but Mitchell stood right in the firing line,

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/SHOWTIME

Ricky Hatton embraces Phillips after beating him on points in April 2003 in Manchester, England. The popular Brit wants a crack at Tszyu, but Phillips, who has fought both men, claims that Tszyu is much stronger and a much harder hitter than Hatton.

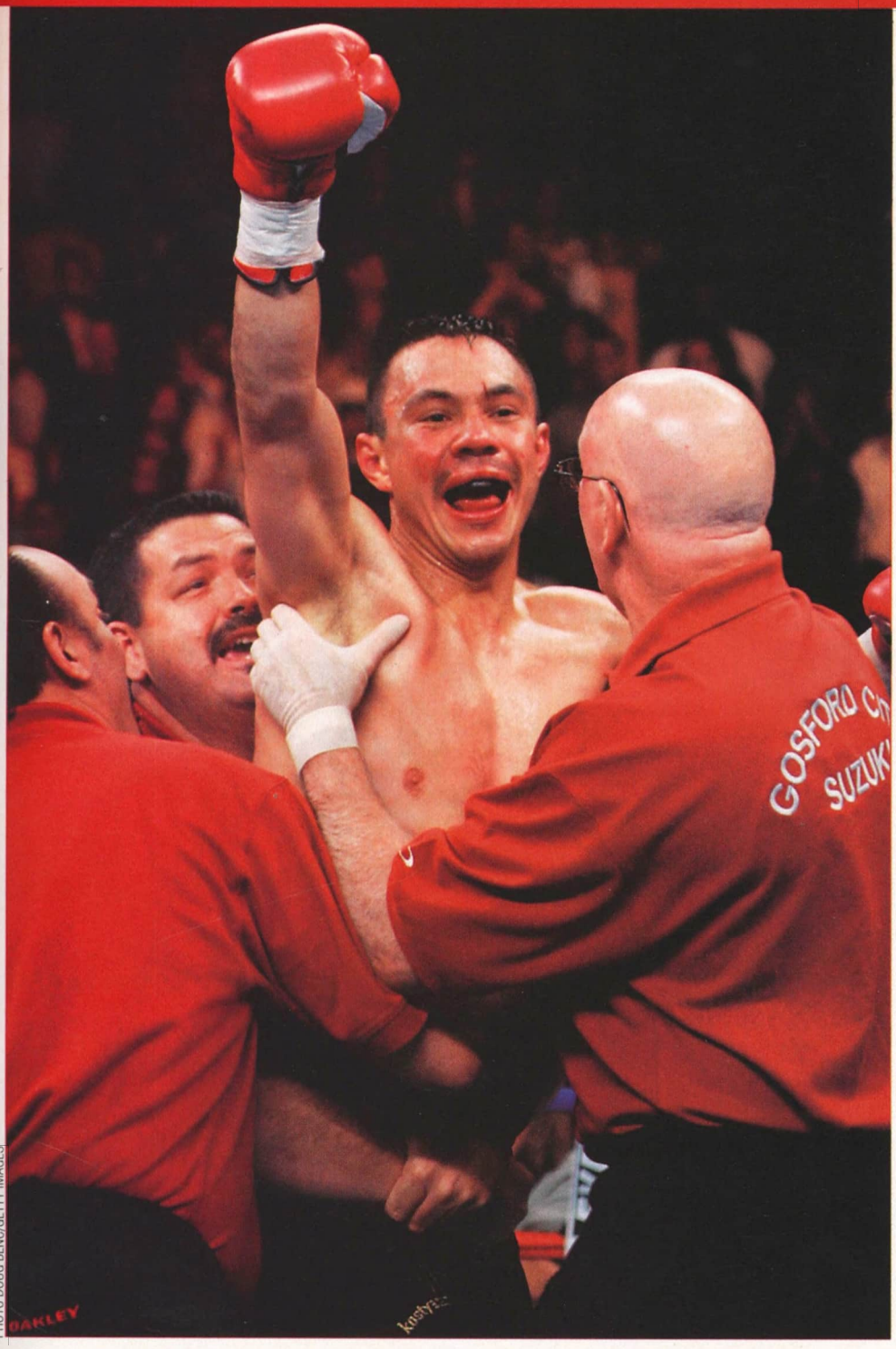


PHOTO DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

A jubilant Tszyu celebrates his knockout of Mitchell with his corner crew. Not only did the pig-tailed puncher have to overcome a talented challenger, he was coming back from an almost two-year layoff due to injuries.

which is like suicide against Tszyu."

Naturally, Hatton still feels he could do better, by slipping the right and staying close, but Phillips, who fought both of them, is quick to disabuse him of this notion.

"If I was Kostya, I'd take on Ricky Hatton next because Hatton's style is made for him. But if I was Hatton, I'd stay well away because Kostya would walk straight through him and knock him out. That's an easy fight for Tszyu."

It is possible that a good mover with a tight defense, a decent punch, strong mind, and a reliable chin could still give Tszyu trouble, as Oktay Urkal did losing a decision in '01. Potential candidates include the wonderfully accomplished, speedy, and versatile Floyd Mayweather, the reborn, quick-stepping Arturo Gatti, the tall, quick-fisted Vivian Harris, or maybe even the switch-hitting Brit Junior Witter, who has developed into a serious puncher. It is possible that the elusive world welterweight champion Cory Spinks could make life difficult for Tszyu, and, in a year or so, the all-round skills of Miguel Cotto will pose a challenge. But right now, the odds should still be in Tszyu's favor against any man in the world at or under 147 pounds. So let's leave the last words to the only man to beat him in 13 years as a professional.

"Overall I'd say Kostya is in a different league from all of them," said Phillips, before taking a half step backward. "Some of them might give him a little trouble, but in the end I think he'd beat them all. He says he wants Gatti or Spinks, but I don't think those guys are ideal. Gatti moves well and hits hard, so there's a small chance of an upset. Spinks is bigger than Mitchell and a better boxer, so he could make Tszyu look bad like he did to Ricardo Mayorga. But then Mayorga didn't know what he was doing, while Kostya's a very controlled boxer. So I'm not saying Spinks would beat Tszyu, just make him look bad for a while."

The 41-year-old veteran smiles again and rallies to the cause, knowing that the more he praises his former victim, the better it looks for his own legacy.

"You know, Kostya Tszyu may be the hardest puncher below middleweight in boxing today and the strongest too, and he's also a great thinking boxer who commands the middle distance. He has too much for any of them."

After seeing how easily Tszyu dismissed the skillful and accomplished Mitchell, it's virtually impossible to disagree. ■

Gavin Evans is a freelance writer based in England and a regular contributor to this magazine.

It's Time To Cash In

CAN WINKY CRASH THE PAY-PER-VIEW BARRIER?

By Ivan Goldman
PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

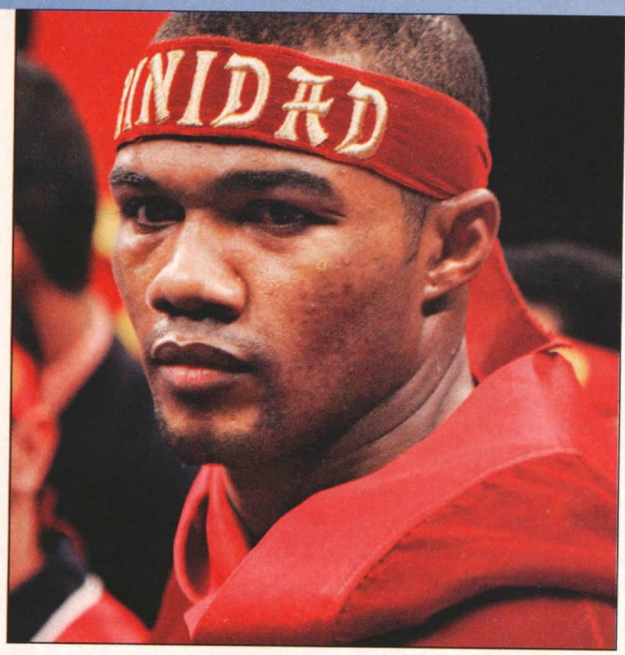
Poor Winky Wright. He's a winner, he gets plenty of respect, and the door to big-time fame and success is no longer locked against him. But it's not wide open either.

In his second straight victory over the once-storied Shane Mosley, the junior middleweight champion showed once again what a tough, disciplined technician he is. But he still lacks two keys to superstardom—one-punch knockout power and charisma. And at age 33, he's not likely to wake up with either quality any morning soon.

Wright's outing against Mosley, 39-4 (35) with 1 no-contest, was a typical Wright event. He used his dazzling southpaw jab and overall ring smarts to upset his opponent's well-laid plans. Afterward, as always, he behaved like the gentleman he is.

But as retired promoter Don Fraser pointed out, "In those 12 rounds, there was nothing close to a knockdown.

If you had to boil down the biggest difference between Wright and Mosley to just three words, they would be "Winky's southpaw jab." Their second fight was more competitive than the first, but Wright still prevailed via majority decision to retain the junior middleweight championship of the world.



Everybody wants to fight middleweight cash cow Felix Trinidad, including Wright. But despite the fact that it would be an excellent match, Wright's tough-to-solve style and his lack of marquee appeal might prove to be major stumbling blocks.

Winky Wright didn't win spectacularly. He's an HBO fighter, but he's just not a pay-per-view guy."

Evidently, neither is Mosley, which explains why the contest was on standard HBO. That made it a treat for fans, but not for Wright's finances. Like most fighters in the waning days of their career, he wants to give his net worth a shot in the arm before he steps off the stage.

The crowd, according to promoter Gary Shaw, numbered more than 8,000, but the fans were spread out among plenty of empty seats in the Mandalay Bay arena. And in Las Vegas, casinos can and do paper a house on short notice.

Mosley had been too proud to accept a smaller purse than Oscar De La Hoya to get a third fight with him. He learned once again that a small share of a big cake can provide more mouthfuls than a big share of a smaller cake. Had he been willing to swallow his pride and accept Oscar's offer, he wouldn't have defended his championship against Wright last March. Perhaps he wouldn't be in such a fix. And for sure he'd be a richer man.

As for Wright, 48-3 (25), though superstardom has yet to show its face to him, he's reached a position where it's no longer possible to ignore him.

"Oscar De La Hoya vs. Bernard Hopkins is not going to happen again," predicted longtime boxing publicist Norman Horton. In fact, Hopkins, now promoted by De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions, became a partner in that company. "Oscar against Felix Trinidad is only a long possibility," Horton continued. "So when you remove those matchups, who's the most logical guy who can garnish some pretty good numbers? I would have to say Winky. He does have a hotter profile now."

Even before his cornermen cut the tape off, Wright was calling out Puerto Rico's Felix Trinidad. Not surprising. The popular Trinidad, after his blistering stoppage of Ricardo Mayorga, may be a hotter commodity now than he was when he began what turned out to be temporary retirement 2½ years ago. But Trinidad is promoted by Don King, which means in order to fight him, Wright would be pressured to sell his future to King in the form of fight options.

"If Winky got a fight with Trinidad, he would of course get the short end of the purse," said Fraser. "But he's been at the short end his whole career."

Presuming Hopkins successfully defends his middleweight championship for an epochal 20th time, he may well look up Wright when it's over. He's pretty much cleaned out the middleweight division.

"Where can Bernard go?" asked boxing publicist Fred Sternburg, who has counted Wright among his clients. "There's not huge money in a fight with Winky. But it's an exciting fight. By itself, it's probably not pay-per-view. But with a little imagination, they can put something together. Make it a doubleheader with Oscar against Mosley and you've got maybe 900,000 buys on pay-per-view."

Maybe.

"You just don't have a lot of major names out there right now that are big box office," said Fraser. "So if De La Hoya wants a marquee fight, that could be Winky Wright. Winky will get a fight with one of those guys and he'll take the short end of the purse with any of them."

Wright made clear that whatever he does, he's in no hurry to give Fernando Vargas a shot. He, along with many observers, believes he bested Vargas in their first bout more than five years ago. But Vargas, who eked out a majority decision, wouldn't give Wright a rematch. It's a slight the normally easy-going Wright won't forget.

On the other hand, it's no certainty that Vargas, coming off a long layoff due to an injured back, would really want to take on Wright anyway.

"Winky," noted Fraser, "is exactly the kind of fighter you don't want your fighters to fight—a southpaw you're not going to make a lot of money with."

De La Hoya, who remains a box-office draw even after being starched by Hopkins in the ninth round, has been

Mosley drills Wright with a hard left. Although he ultimately came up a bit short, Sugar Shane, working with trainer Joe Goossen for the first time, made many of the rounds close. But he failed to do enough to convince the judges he'd regained the 154-pound title.

Winky's money punch: As is usually the case, Wright was on target again and again with his punishing southpaw jab. As the junior middleweight champion is a natural right-hander, the lead right can feel like a powerpunch, as Mosley knows all too well.

sending out signals he may go back down all the way to welterweight. If he does, that would likely put him out of Wright's reach.

Jermain Taylor turned 26 in August. Sometime soon the advancing middleweight dynamo will have to try the altitude on that top step. It could place him in the ring with Wright. And Felix Sturm, who lost a very debatable decision to De La Hoya, giving him all he could handle and arguably more, can't be dismissed either.

The Mosley fight was Wright's last under existing contracts with promoter Square Ring (Roy Jones' company) and manager James Prince, but he was considering renewing both. Wright has come a long way since shooting out of obscurity to give Vargas such a hard time in

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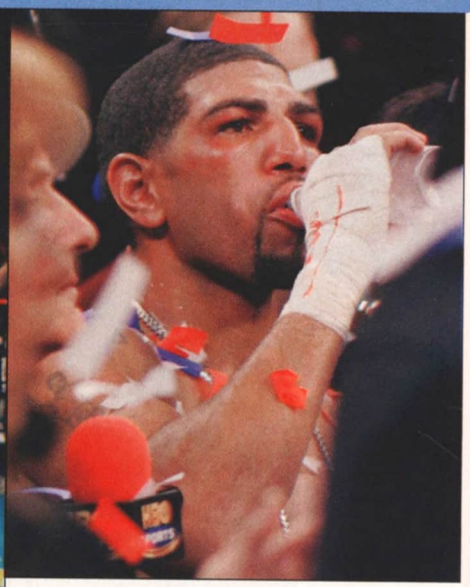

Believing he won, Mosley celebrates before the decision is announced (left). But once the scores were read, it was Wright who was chugging water and enjoying his hard-earned moment of victory.

December '99. At the time, analysts spent more energy trying to figure out what went wrong with the celebrated Vargas than they did noticing what went right with Wright.

Wright holds the WBC, WBA, and THE RING belts and would also own the IBF title, but the alphabet gang stripped him for daring to give Mosley his rematch rather than make a mandatory defense against Kassim Ouma. Ouma, by virtue of his second victory over tough, won't-go-away Verno Phillips, took the IBF title and will no doubt be heard from again. But any promoter will tell you that Africans have a tough time gathering a crowd in America. Anybody remember an Ike Quartey fan club?

Another African junior middle knocking on the door is Ghana native Kofi Jantuah, who scored a spectacular first-round kayo over previously undefeated Marco Antonio Rubio on the undercard of Hopkins vs. De La Hoya.

Among Wright's principal assets is the fact that he's fighting in the correct weight division. He turned pro as a junior middle in 1990 and he's still there. Mosley, 33, who started at lightweight, went up to 154 chasing a second fight with De La Hoya. It was probably a mistake to go north of 147. He arguably should be fighting at 140. There he'd have found mega-fights with big names like Kostya Tszyu, Floyd Mayweather, and Arturo Gatti.

De La Hoya, like Mosley, lost something when he went past 147. One could speculate for hours on how their careers would have turned out if they had managed to keep their weight down. Oscar wouldn't have been flattened by Hopkins and Mosley would never have run into tricky Winky.

Wright, training rigorously and watching his diet carefully, waited for smaller men to put on pounds and come to him. Hopkins, always in shape, used the same winning formula at middleweight.

It's worth remembering that Wright could have delayed facing Mosley a second time. But after a lifetime of being ducked by everybody, he felt honor-bound to give Mosley the rematch he wanted. Because Wright and Mosley are known as two of boxing's nicest guys, publicists had a hard time selling this as some kind of grudge match. When referee Joe Cortez ordered them to touch gloves to begin round 12, the two fighters hugged each other.

Mosley, who trained with Joe Goossen instead of his father, Jack, his trainer since childhood, came closer in the second match, losing by majority decision. But it wasn't offense that created the most memorable moment. In the fifth round, Wright, mimicking free spirit Ricardo Mayorga, dropped both gloves to his sides to show Mosley he couldn't hurt him. Mosley, not looking a gift horse in the mouth, immediately slammed him with bodyshots and a big right hook that swiveled Wright's head to the side. It was a turning point of sorts. Mosley started coming on, but overall, Wright was still getting more done. Wright's antics gave his longtime trainer Dan Birmingham fits.

"It was a matter of Winky letting Shane back in rather than Shane fighting his way back in," noted Sternburg.

This was a better fight to watch than the first one. There were no dull rounds and few dull moments. Fans saw two craftsmen at work. It was also one of those fights in which the CompuBox stats pretty much told the story—154 connects out of 642 punches for Mosley versus 273 of 662 for Wright, for connect percentages of 24 percent and 41 percent, respectively. Wright remained hard to hit, even for the game, savvy Mosley.

Mosley felt he won. He certainly wasn't destroyed. Several rounds were close, but Wright appeared to win most of them.

Hubert Earle of Nova Scotia saw it 114-114 and Duane Ford of Nevada and Tommy Kaczmarek of New Jersey both scored it 115-113 Wright. THE RING saw it 117-111 for Wright.

"Mosley," said Fraser, "didn't know how to win a round in the last 20 seconds." And though Mosley knows plenty, Wright showed once again that there's nothing about this game he doesn't know.

His challenge now is to translate that into dollars. ■

Ivan Goldman is THE RING's West Coast correspondent.

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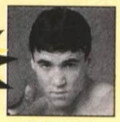

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The RING Asks And Answers . . .

10 BURNING QUESTIONS FOR 2005

By Eric Raskin

Another year has come and gone and proven that, in boxing, we never know what to expect. Four combined knockout losses for the trio of Roy Jones, Mike Tyson, and Oscar De La Hoya. Riddick Bowe active at year's end, Lennox Lewis not. Felix Trinidad with more bouts on his 2004 dossier than Fernando Vargas and Vernon Forrest combined. DaVarryl Williamson's career in better shape than Joe Mesi's. If you claim that you predicted all of the above, then you may want to look in the mirror and see how much your nose is growing.

But as unpredictable as this sport is, we can still make educated guesses about what the coming year will bring. So, as we've done the last couple of years with reasonable success, we've asked 10 questions that are on boxing fans' minds entering the new year, and we've provided the answers. We think our speculation is going to prove fairly accurate, but if we're way off—well, we won't be the only knockout victims who never saw it coming.

1.

What superfights can we look forward to in '05?

Let's go in decreasing order of certainty while also going in increasing order of money-making potential.

It's pretty much a done deal that we'll get a rematch on February 26 to last May's outstanding featherweight title draw between Manny Pacquiao and Juan Manuel Marquez. This may or may not qualify as a superfight, but it's on any hardcore fan's short list of desired matches.

A junior welterweight showdown between Arturo Gatti and Floyd Mayweather is almost as much of a sure thing, with Jesse James Leija providing the greatest obstacle when he faces Gatti on January 29. If Gatti survives Leija, set aside some pay-per-view money for a Saturday in June.

But if you're talking *superfights*, you have to talk about Felix Trinidad and his potential rematches with either Bernard Hopkins or Oscar De La Hoya. Trinidad is scheduled for a March 12 PPV against someone of slightly lower star status, but then it's probably on to either "The Executioner" or "The Golden Boy." The hunch here is that De La Hoya will come first. The folks at HBO PPV believe that Oscar-Tito II is the bigger seller, and it's easy to see why: De La Hoya, despite losing to Hopkins, still has the bigger mainstream fan base, plus hardcore fans will view Trinidad-De La Hoya as a tougher fight to predict than Hopkins-Trinidad. After all, the first De La Hoya fight was highly inconclusive, whereas Tito's loss to Hopkins was as decisive as it gets. Also, Hopkins isn't going to make any negotiation with Don King easy. The final prediction: September has always been a big month for PPVs, so look for Trinidad-De La Hoya II then, with Hopkins-Trinidad II to follow if Tito wins.

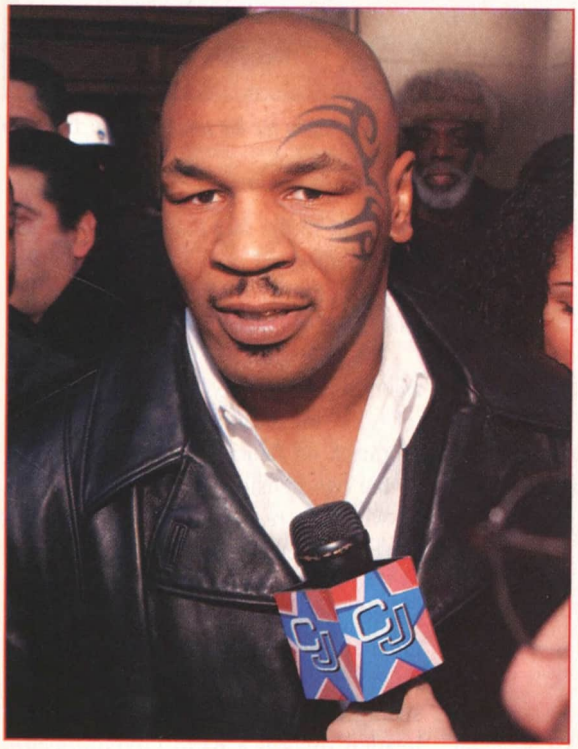
2.

Will Mike Tyson fight again?

It's not easy to analyze a fighter who tells one interviewer that he's been rehab-

PHOTO BY JOHN GURZINSKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Juan Manuel Marquez and Manny Pacquiao are planning to renew hostilities on February 26 in one of 2005's most hotly anticipated matches. Opinions may vary on whether this qualifies as a "superfight," but it was unquestionably a super fight the first time around.



Mike Tyson's boxing career continued its downward spiral in 2004, but that doesn't necessarily mean we've seen the last of him in a boxing ring. But before fighting again, the eternally popular heavyweight will have to rehab his injured knee.

bing his injured knee "confuciously," then tells another interviewer a few weeks later that he hasn't started rehabbing his knee yet. But that's Tyson. If the things he said and did were logical and predictable, he wouldn't be Mike Tyson.

On the one hand, it would seem Tyson has to keep fighting if he's ever going to be able to pay off his tens of millions of dollars of debt. At the same time, however, his body is breaking down, he seems to know he's not a serious contender anymore, and he doesn't particularly enjoy training or getting into the ring with guys who fight back. He still loves the sport of boxing—why else would he show up at practically every major fight?—but he doesn't love being a boxer anymore. Clearly, what his heart wants and what his wallet wants are at odds.

Sadly, the wallet seems bound to win out. It won out after the Lennox Lewis fight, when Tyson admitted that fading into a dyslexic man's oblivion held appeal. If he couldn't quit then, he's not going to be able to quit now. He can still make a couple of million for his next fight. And if he gets on a winning streak, that number will rise. So bring on the Kevin McBrides of the world. Tyson, reluctantly, will be back in '05.

3.

Will James Toney rise to the top of the heavyweight division?

The odds are against it, and here's a mathematical explanation why: Let's assume Vitali Klitschko is still the champ when you're reading this; all told, Toney would have about a 50-50 shot at beating him (some people think Klitschko's a heavy favorite, some say Toney is, so let's take the middle of the road). At the same time, Toney seems to have about a 50-50

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

In his lone bout of '04, James Toney handed heavyweight Rydell Booker his first loss, but took home an arm injury for his troubles. Will Toney be healthy enough—and good enough—to win the heavyweight championship this year?

shot at being healthy enough to fight for the championship. Two major injuries on '04 (first an Achilles' tendon, then a biceps muscle) make that a reasonable estimate. Run those two 50-50 propositions through the calculator, and you come up with a 25 percent chance that Toney will become heavyweight champ in '05.

Of course, there are all sorts of variables involved and flaws in how that number was derived. If Danny Williams beats Klitschko, Toney's chances of winning the championship might go up. At age 36, though, maybe 50-50 was too optimistic an estimate for his health. Many a fighter has started racking up the injuries in his mid-30s, never to quite return to peak physical capacity. And as for Toney's chances against Klitschko, who really knows? His wins over Evander Holyfield and Rydell Booker ultimately reveal little about a matchup with the Ukrainian giant.

So crank out the numbers however you like. Maybe it's really 20 percent. Maybe it's more like 33⅓. The bottom line is that Toney's a magnificent fighter competing in a lousy heavyweight division—and still he's an underdog to go all the way.

4.

Which RING championship vacancies are most likely to be filled in '05?

As 2004 draws to a close, there are more championships vacant (nine) than filled (eight), and the number of RING champs has even decreased by two since this time last year. We suppose that's a testament to the fact that we haven't just been handing out titles for the sake of filling them, but we'd nevertheless like to see those numbers reverse themselves.

The only firm bet is at cruiserweight, where top-rated Wayne Braithwaite is set to take on number two Jean-Marc Mormeck on January 22. Barring a draw, all but two divisions from 126 pounds on up will have *real* world champions when this one's over.

The bad news is that no other weight classes are particularly promising. Super middleweight is a weak division headed nowhere, while junior lightweight is a strong division that just doesn't seem headed toward a RING championship. And, as always, don't hold your breath for any of the six divisions from 122 pounds on down.

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

"All we want for Christmas is a big-time fight." Ricky Hatton and Joe Calzaghe have both been stuck in limbo recently, taking unimportant fights that prove nothing. The fans and media are growing impatient waiting for promoter Frank Warren to put them at risk. Perhaps it will finally happen in 2005.

exist—the Antonio Tarver-Glen Johnson winner, Jeff Lacy, Bernard Hopkins—but Calzaghe seems relatively content to feed on a diet of guys like Mger Mkrtchian and Kabary Salem. At least Hatton's fighting foes we've heard of, like Ray Oliveira. If either guy is going to pressure promoter Frank Warren to make a fight before the social SERPS checks start coming in, it's Hatton.

6.

What impact will the boxing reality shows have on the sport?

This is really two questions rolled into one, so let's answer the easy part first: Fox's *The Next Great Champ* will have no impact whatsoever on the sport. Hardly anybody was watching (especially after the show got shifted to Fox Sports Net midseason), and the fighters have redefined mediocrity.

5.

Who will have a meaningful fight first: Joe Calzaghe or Ricky Hatton?

We've given these two wheel-spinning Brits the benefit of the doubt and assumed they'll both get there before Audley Harrison. But, truth be told, we wouldn't bet our lives on that.

Still, this is a pretty easy question to answer. It has to be Hatton. "The Hitman" has been more outspoken than Calzaghe about how badly he wants to prove himself, and he also resides on the fertile grounds of the junior welterweights. There are several fights out there for Hatton that qualify as "meaningful"—including a date with world champion Kostya Tszyu, which would seem the perfect Showtime fight for Tszyu as he waits for Arturo Gatti and Floyd Mayweather to take care of their business on HBO.

Calzaghe has fewer attractive options at super middleweight, and even at light heavy, the herd is thinning now that Roy Jones is on his way out. Good matchups

PHOTO BY FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES

Oscar De La Hoya poses with some of the boxers in his Fox TV reality show* The Next Great Champ. *The series has not been very successful, but it remains to be seen if the NBC version, Ray Leonard's* The Contender, *does any better or has any impact on the sport.

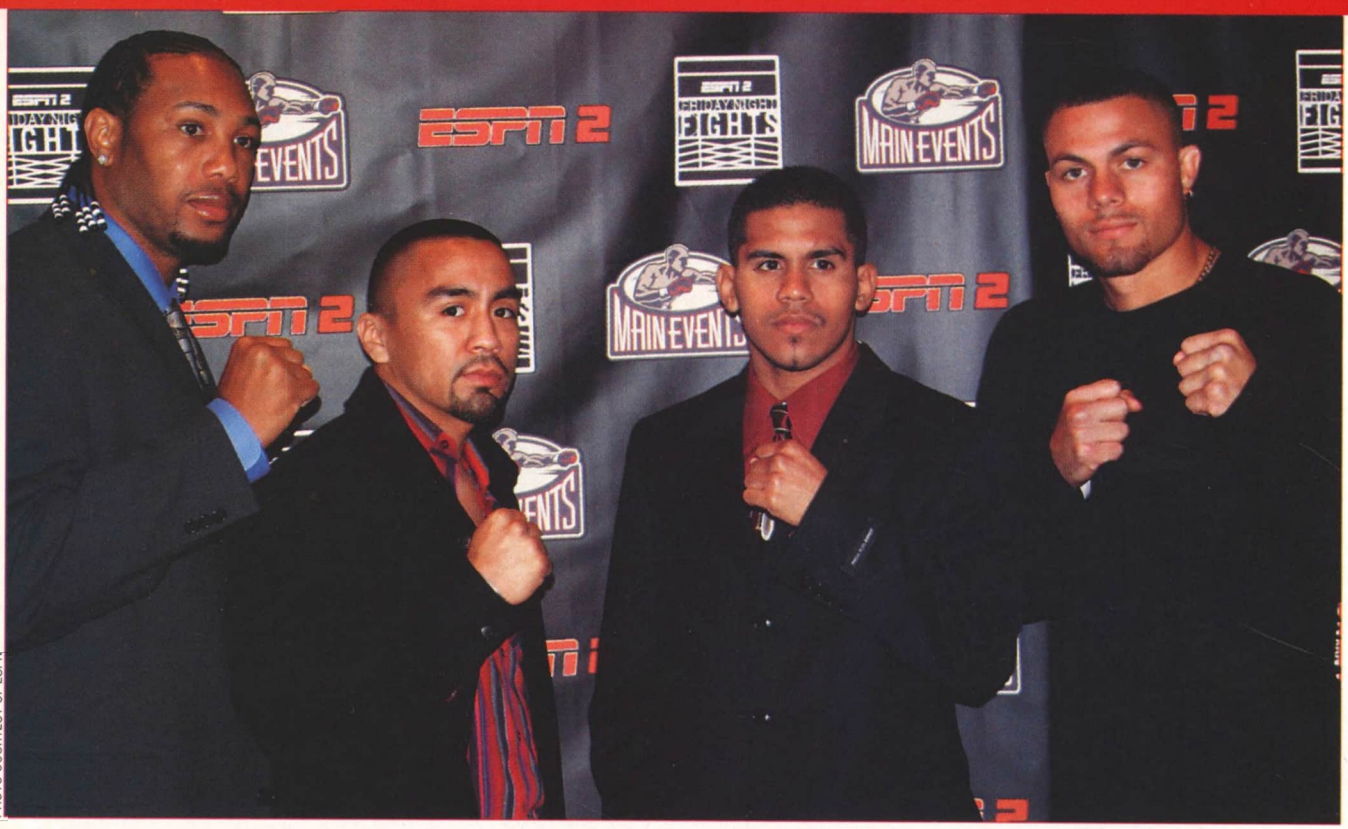


PHOTO COURTESY OF ESPN

Main Events and ESPN are optimistic that Dominick Guinn, Rocky Juarez, Juan Diaz, and Kermit Cintron are almost ready to sell pay-per-views, but we're not so sure. Nevertheless, two PPVs centered around these fighters are scheduled for '05.

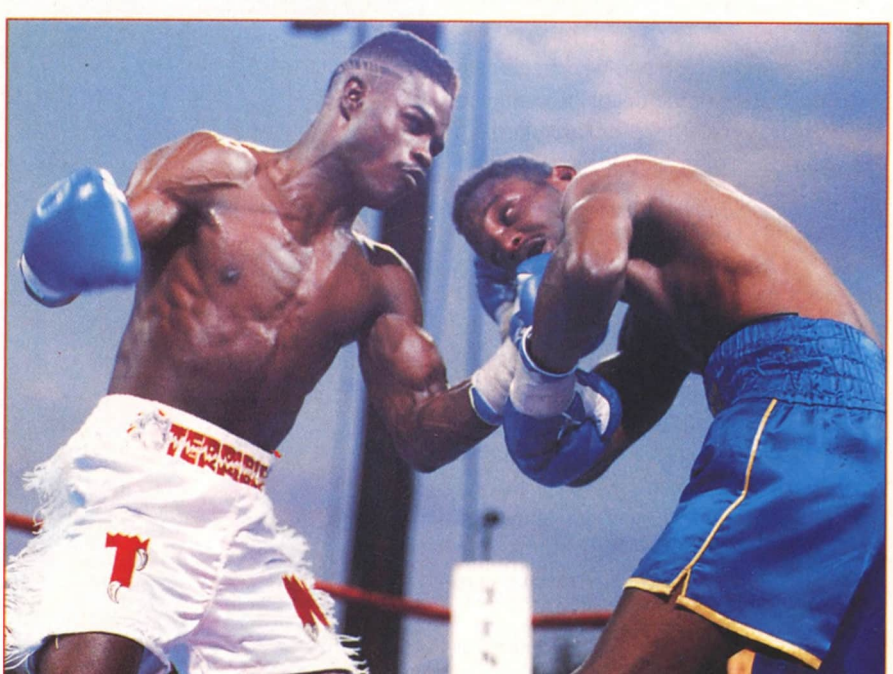
Were it not for *The Benefactor*, this would've been the supreme reality show failure of the fall season.

The more difficult part of the question to answer concerns NBC's *The Contender*, which hasn't started airing yet. With nothing to go on, we have to make educated guesses about how entertaining the show will be, what ratings it will draw, and whether any potential star fighters are competing. So here goes: With Mark Burnett (*Survivor*, *The Apprentice*) pulling the strings, chances are the product will be entertaining; with the built-in Burnett audience and the star power of Sylvester Stallone, Ray Leonard, and George Foreman, the ratings should be respectable, if not necessarily earth-shattering; and based on our inside information, it seems the "cast" will include some decent prospects. Taking all of that into consideration, the guess is that the impact will be minimal, but at least there will be an impact. Don't expect NBC to start broadcasting major fights in prime time as a result of *The Contender*. But having a few young fighters emerge with name value and a bit of drawing power is certainly conceivable.

7.

Will a superstar emerge from the Main Events/ESPN union?

If you could combine the best attributes of the four primary fighters involved in this deal, you might have something. You take Dominick Guinn's size, Kermit Cintron's punching power, Rocky Juarez' technique, and Juan Diaz' work ethic, and



Are Terry Norris or Donald Curry headed for Canastota as part of the Class of '05? A prime Norris beat a faded Curry back in 1991 (pictured), and "Terrible Terry" might beat him to the Hall of Fame as well.

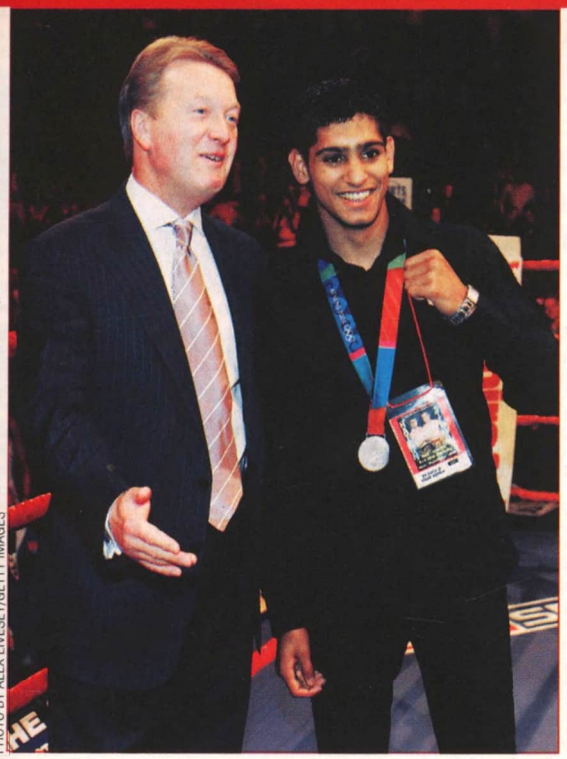


PHOTO BY ALEX LIVESEY/GETTY IMAGES

British Olympic hero Amir Khan poses with his silver medal and promoter Frank Warren. Khan has a tremendous future ahead of him, but will probably remain an amateur for a few more years.

you'd have the young superstar boxing needs. But each fighter, individually, has flaws, or at least major question marks, that make superstardom seem unlikely. The ESPN exposure will provide a huge push. And Cintron, especially, has a quality about him that compels you to tune in every time he fights. But none of these guys are ready to become major PPV attractions within the next 12 months.

8.

What "modern" fighters will be inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame?

This is one of the toughest years ever to predict who's going in because there are no truly legendary names on the ballot and no noteworthy first-time eligibles. We guess nobody all that great retired in 1999.

But if the IBHOF insists on inducting the top four vote-getters, then we suppose some of the relatively recent, well-known fighters have a good chance. Popular pugilists Bobby Chacon, Terry Norris, and Donald Curry are all on the ballot once again and, deserving or not, have reasonable shots at getting voted in. Brian Mitchell, Barry McGuigan, Samuel Serrano, and Myung-Woo Yuh can't be counted out either. If you're looking for an older fighter, Joey Archer, Johnny Bratton, Pone Kingpetch, and Holman Williams are among the more fondly remembered names on the ballot.

9.

Will any of the 2004 Olympians make an immediate impact?

Let's put it this way: Even when the Olympians are outstanding young fighters, they hardly ever make serious noise in their first year as pros. That doesn't bode well for the 2004 crew.

Five of the 11 gold medalists are Cuban, so don't expect any of them to go pro. Of the Americans, light heavyweight gold winner Andre Ward may have already turned pro on HBO by the time you read this, so he could be developing into an attraction as '05 progresses. But he'd have to exhibit a more exciting style as a pro than he did as an amateur if he's going to develop a serious buzz.

The one Olympian who could make waves right out of the gate is Amir Khan, at least in England, where he's already arguably the country's most popular boxer. But all signs point to silver medalist Khan waiting a couple of years to go pro.

In other words, enjoy the continued blossoming of the 2000 Olympians, guys like Miguel Cotto and Jermain Taylor. Because the '04 gang doesn't figure to cause much of a stir for a while.

10.

Who will be the pound-for-pound king at year's end?

Maybe it's uncreative to go with the status quo, but it also makes sense. Bernard Hopkins is the odds-on favorite to still be king of the mountain as his 41st birthday approaches.

But there are two scenarios that could change that. While Hopkins isn't likely to lose at middleweight, a challenge for the light heavyweight title would put his 12-year unbeaten streak and position atop the P4P ladder in jeopardy. And there is one way he could potentially be overtaken even if he doesn't lose: If Floyd Mayweather and Kostya Tszyu happen to fight and either guy wins impressively, the argument to move that fighter past Hopkins might be too powerful to ignore.

But making that bout between an HBO fighter and a Showtime fighter won't be easy. And neither will beating the masterful Hopkins, at whatever weight he fights. So we're going with the old man for one more year. ■

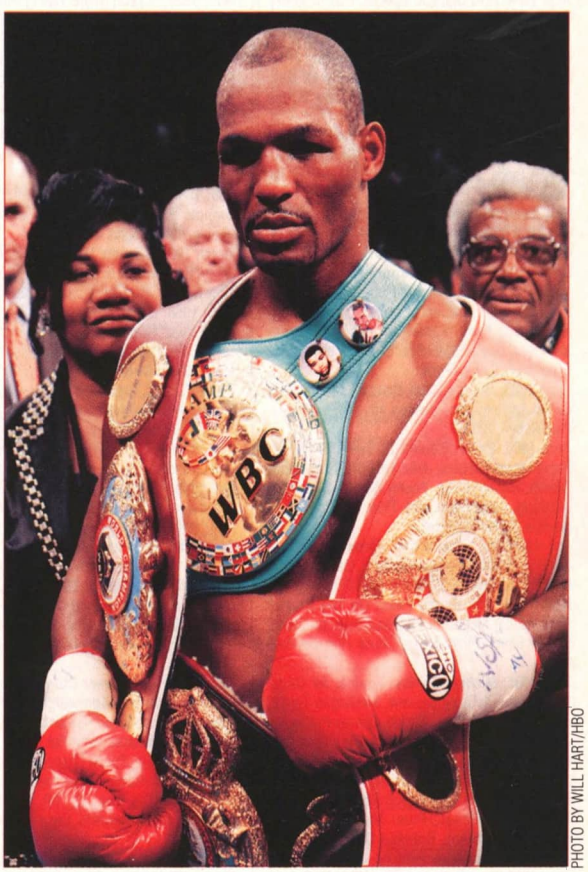


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Bernard Hopkins is almost universally regarded as boxing's best right now, but that could change over the next 12 months. Whether Hopkins decides to move up in weight should be a key factor.

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Fall 2004: Trinidad vs. Mayorga: Comeback Or Calamity. Also: Vitali Klitschko, Marco Antonio Barrera, Juan Diaz, Jimmy Clabby.

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"VICIOUS" VIVIAN HARRIS

"He's One Of Those Guys Nobody Wants To Fight"

By Don Stradley

WBA titleholder Vivian Harris was on television again. He wasn't boxing, but it felt good to be in front of a camera. Kostya Tszyu had just crushed Sharmba Mitchell to retain the world junior welter championship and was talking to Showtime's Jim Gray when Harris and his manager, Emanuel Steward, appeared out of nowhere.

It was one of the oldest ploys in boxing: Show up at the champ's victory celebration, make a challenge, and get people talking. Tszyu was polite to Harris, but coyly said he was only interested in "big fights." Tszyu was unclear as to whether Harris fits into this "big fight" category. But give Tszyu credit. At least he knew Harris was a beltholder. When Harris approached Steward to work with him last year, the veteran handler knew less than that.

"I had free time now that Lennox Lewis had retired," said Steward. "I'm thinking I can help Vivian become a champion. Then he tells me he already is one. I thought he had some off-the-wall NABO title or something, but it turns out he has the WBA. That shows you how bad I am."

You can't blame Steward for not keeping track of the alphabet titles. But in Harris' case, it was proof that he's one of the best-kept secrets in boxing. This is our loss because "Vicious" Vivian has some personality ("I ripped Golden Johnson's stomach out, and that's what I'll do to Ricky Hatton. I'll punch right through Ricky's body and make my fist come out the other end."). Along with his trash talk, he possesses a booming right hand, as German fans recently saw when he defeated Oktay Urkal for the second time in 2004. Their April meeting resulted in a close decision win for Harris, but in October, Harris won by a dramatic 11th-round knockout. (Between those two fights with Urkal, the WBA stripped world champion Tszyu and elevated Harris to the position of sole titleholder.)

"They put the fight right in the guy's neighborhood," said Steward of the Urkal rematch. "It was in a little civic center, a 4,000 capacity arena. Urkal is Turkish, and 90 percent of the audience was Turkish. They did everything they could to make sure Urkal won. Before the ninth round, I told Harris, 'You don't want this fight to be close.' He said, 'Okay, I'm keeping my title,' and then he went and knocked Urkal out."

In an earlier era, Harris, 25-1-1 (17), would have been one of those tough challengers that champions avoided. But in this era, where alphabet belts are handed out like Halloween candy, he's a titlist the challengers can avoid. Harris thought he'd be fighting Miguel Cotto on HBO, but Cotto instead fought Kelson Pinto. Rumors of a bout with Floyd Mayweather also came and went.

"I'm upset," said Harris. "These guys are all great, but they don't want to take chances."

Harris' biggest non-battle of the year came against England's Hatton, a fight Harris wanted but refused because he felt Hatton's promoter, Frank Warren, was disrespecting him. He was also seething at the way his own promoter, Main Events, treated him during the Hatton episode.

"Main Events wanted me to fight Hatton so they could collect their 30 percent and use it to invest in their other fighters," Harris said. "They weren't concerned about my best interests. Otherwise, they would have done everything to get that fight over here on Showtime. Instead, they let Warren dictate the terms. What the *bleep* is that? How are they letting someone else dictate the terms for my title?

"I've done a lot of things I didn't want to do to get here. When I won the title I only made $90,000, but I didn't argue. My goal was just to win a title and then make the money. Then Hatton's promoter tells me I don't deserve more money than Hatton?"

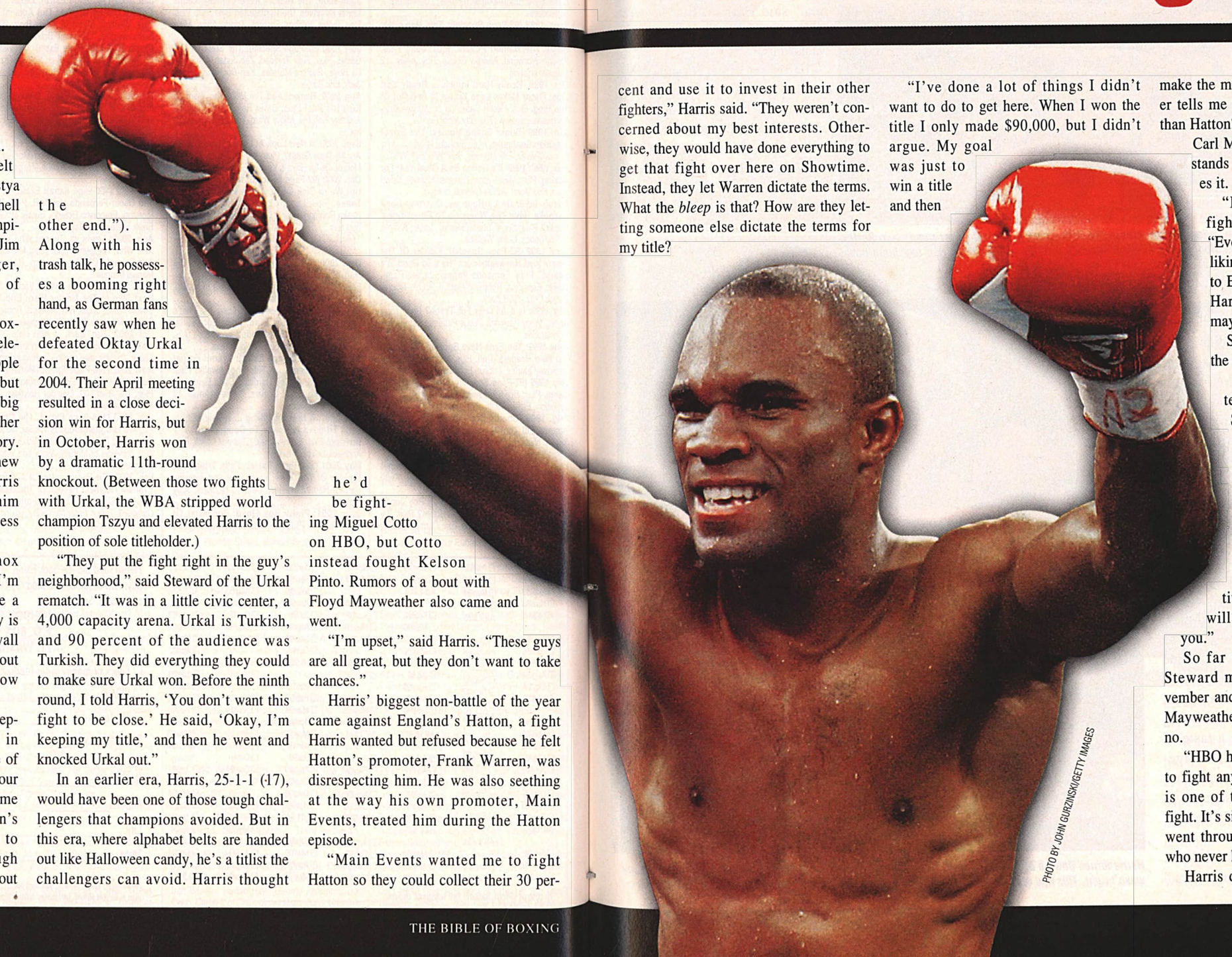

PHOTO BY JOHN GURZINSKI/GETTY IMAGES

Carl Moretti of Main Events understands Harris' beefing, but dismisses it.

"He made a mistake by not fighting Hatton," Moretti said. "Even if the money wasn't to his liking, he should have gone over to England and knocked him out. Harris blew an opportunity. He may regret it."

Steward has his own take on the subject.

"Ricky Hatton is much better than anyone thinks," said Steward. "I looked at it as a 50/50 fight. You don't want a tight fight like that in Manchester. I told Vivian the most important thing is to keep your title. It doesn't matter who you defend against or how much money you make, if you keep your title in this hot division, they will eventually have to come to you."

So far there have been no takers. Steward met HBO executives in November and pushed the idea of a Harris-Mayweather match. HBO's answer was no.

"HBO has trouble getting Mayweather to fight anybody," said Steward. "Harris is one of those guys nobody wants to fight. It's similar to what Mike McCallum went through. Mike was a good fighter who never had the big fights."

Harris doesn't mind being compared

PHOTO BY MIGUEL VILLAGRAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Harris walks away from Oktay Urkal after flooring him in the 11th round of their October rematch in Berlin, Germany. Referee Armando Garcia stopped the fight 56 seconds into the round after Urkal had been down twice. It was Harris' ninth straight win and elevated his overall record to 25-1-1 (17).

to McCallum—he sometimes refers to himself as "The Bodysnatcher" in homage to the Hall of Famer—but he didn't take up boxing to be on the outside looking in.

Harris was one of 17 children born to Herman Harris, a boxing promoter from Georgetown, Guyana. Vivian knew of Guyana's rich boxing tradition, but spent his childhood playing soccer. While watching his brother, Wayne, a professional fighter who once fought Reggie Johnson for the WBA middleweight belt, Vivian realized his love for the sport.

"He was knocked down, and I jumped up on the ropes and started screaming, 'Get up, Wayne!' My friends told me I should become a boxer because I was so passionate. Seeing Wayne lose made me feel vengeful."

Harris was soon in a boxing gym, learning the skills that would bring him three amateur titles and a taste of fame in Guyana. At 15, he left Georgetown to live with his mother and other siblings in Brooklyn. The adjustment was easy because Brooklyn had many Georgetown transplants.

"The first thing I did was dial 411 and ask for a boxing gym," he remembers. They directed me to The Bed-Stuy Boxing Center. It was no place for cowards. It was real fighting."

At the Bed-Stuy gym Harris met and worked with Lennox Blackmoore, a noted Georgetown middleweight of the 1970s who had also relocated to New York. Blackmoore had once kayoed Vivian's brother, Wayne.

"Blackmoore helped me adjust to the more aggressive style in America," said Harris. "But we were aggressive in Guyana too. Nobody wants to lose."

Harris' pro career began in 1997. His height, power, and competitive nature served him well until 2000 when, in his 17th fight, Harris lost by decision to the more experienced Ray Oliveira. Harris now admits to looking past Oliveira, a mistake he vows to never repeat. Then came a bout with Ivan Robinson in Atlantic City. Harris got the better of Robinson, but a flaky

PHOTO BY ALEX LIVESEY/GETTY IMAGES

Harris turned down a big payday against British star Ricky Hatton (pictured) because he felt the money wasn't right. This and other problems led to a rift between Harris and his promoter, Main Events.

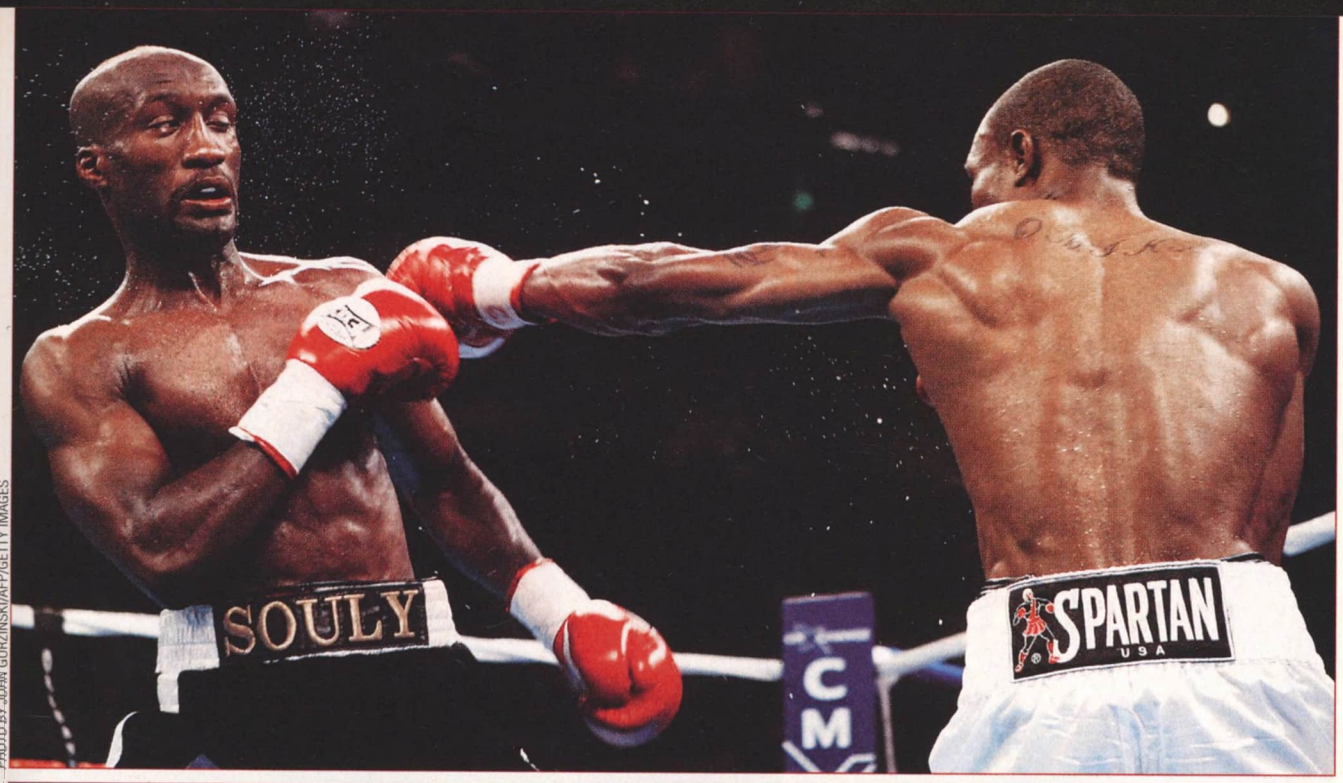

PHOTO BY JOHN GURZINSKI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO BY ROBERT MICHAEL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Although Harris has tallied 17 knockouts in his 25 pro victories, he's more of a boxer than a slugger. He made excellent use of his left jab against Souleymane M'baye (above) in July 2003 and also in the first Urkal fight (left), in April 2004. Harris won both bouts via 12-round decision.

New Jersey scoring system gave him no better than a draw. One month later, muggers near his Flatbush apartment stabbed Harris.

"They wanted my bracelet, but I went after them," he recalled. "I got poked in the stomach with a knife. It wasn't major. I was training within a month."

Harris returned to boxing in 2001 and won five consecutive fights, earning a shot at minor beltholder Diobelys Hurtado. Harris clubbed Hurtado to the canvas in two rounds.

"Winning the title was my dream, but then things got bad," said Harris. "Main Events forgot about me."

Harris fought only once in 2003, appearing on the non-televised undercard of the Ricardo Mayorga-Vernon Forrest rematch, where he won a 12-round decision over Souleymane M'baye. Harris was unhappy with his adviser, Shelly Finkel, and his lack of television exposure. He begged for a fight with Gatti, but Main Events frowned on matching two of their own fighters. Then Harris abruptly split from Blackmoore, a move that stunned the Guyanese trainer.

"He didn't even say goodbye," Blackmoore said. "It's still a mystery to me."

Rumors circulated that Harris was having personal problems. Harris said cryptically, "It's the kind of thing you expect in Brooklyn," and left it at that. Steward was more blunt: "His life was in turmoil."

Harris moved to Miami, Florida. For a while he trained with his father, but

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/HBO

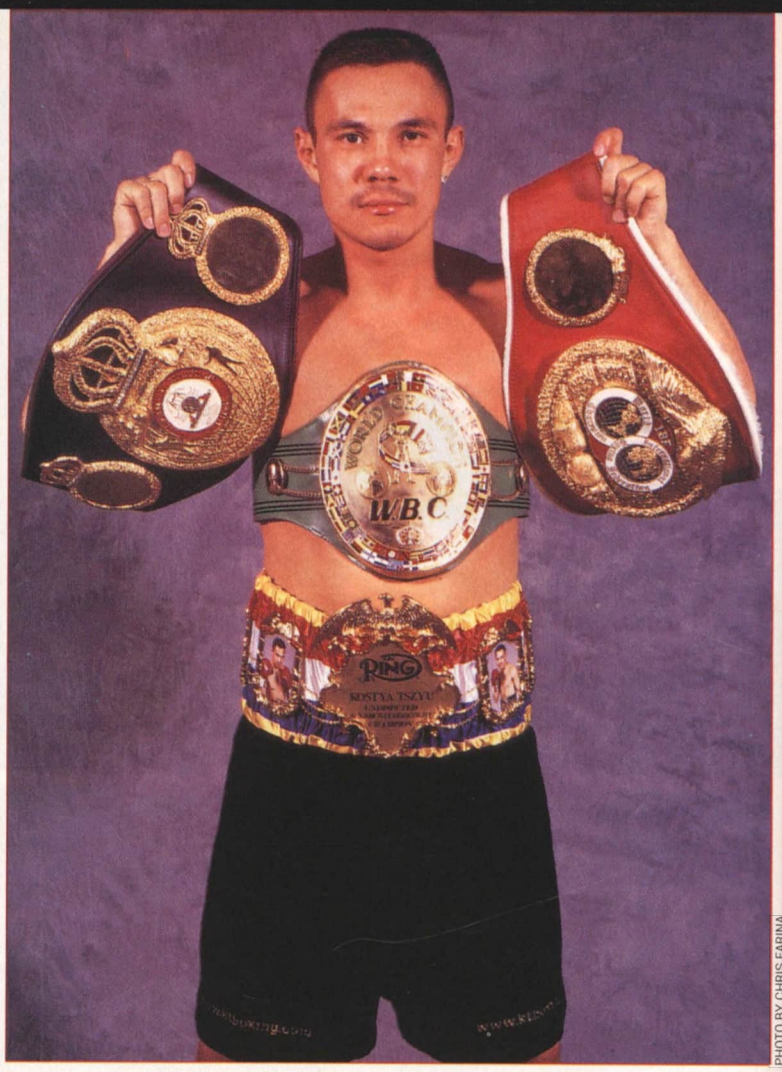

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Two targets: Harris would love to get a crack at either fan favorite Arturo Gatti (above left) or world 140-pound champion Kostya Tszyu (above right), but both are way bigger attractions than Harris and will probably opt to fight foes who mean more at the box office.

Herman suggested he seek out Steward. Steward hesitated.

"I was only interested in training fighters if I was also managing them. Otherwise there's too much frustration. So he asked me to be his manager too. I didn't even know Shelly Finkel had been his manager. I didn't know a damned thing about him. He had to explain it all to me."

The relationship has been good for Harris.

"At the Tszyu fight, Showtime made me feel welcome," Harris said. "It was so different from when I was with Shelly. Showtime treated me like a champion, and I think it's because of Emanuel."

But Harris is still critical of how Main Events ignores him in favor of their more popular fighters, namely Gatti, Juan Diaz, Francisco Bojado, and Rocky Juarez. Moretti feels Harris is wrongheaded.

"When a fighter like Gatti can sell 15,000 seats just by sneezing, he moves to the front of the line," said Moretti. "As for the younger guys, they came from the amateurs with credentials and were offered deals with Showtime. Harris can believe what he wants. We want him to succeed."

Moretti thinks the recent deal struck by Main Events and ESPN would be an ideal way for Harris to gain some exposure. Harris would happily fight on ESPN or an ESPN pay-per-view, but Showtime commentator Al Bernstein believes Harris could make some noise on Showtime.

"He's obviously a good fighter, and we've all wondered how he would do against better competition," said Bernstein. "I'd still have to make Tszyu the favorite, but Harris might improve with Emanuel in his corner. Emanuel has always been a believer in tall fighters who use their height, like Lewis and Hearns. Maybe he sees Harris that way."

If the mercurial Harris can't land his dream fight in 2005, his only choice will be to keep fighting and winning until someone takes notice. For now, frustrations with the business aside, life isn't bad. He lives in Miami with his fiancee and their two children. He has a new manager who will work hard for him. Hopefully, the next time we see him on television, he'll be wearing boxing gear instead of street clothes. Until then, Harris is trying to be patient.

"Everything happens for a reason," he said. "Whatever God wants to have happen, I'll let it happen. I believe in God."

And now that Harris has Steward in his corner, he also has somebody who he feels believes in him. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Rockport, Massachusetts, and a regular contributor to this magazine.

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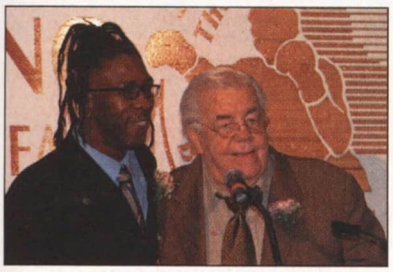
BANQUET OF CHAMPIONS



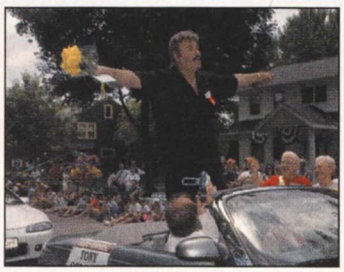
Reminiscing . . . Livingstone Bramble and Lou Duva share fight stories with Banquet crowd.

FIST CASTING

Everlasting . . . Fist cast by George Foreman.

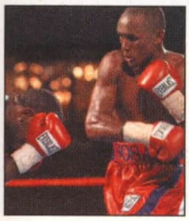
PARADE OF CHAMPIONS

Marvelous . . . Marvin Hagler waves to fans.



Hooray . . . Grand Marshal Tony Orlando enjoys fans along Parade route.

CELEBRITY BOXING NIGHT



VICTORIANO SOSA

Fight Night . . . Popular boxers featured in action-packed bouts at Turning Stone Casino Resort.

MUSEUM GROUNDS

Autographs . . . George Foreman spends time signing autographs on the Museum grounds.

5K RACE, FUN RUN

Finish Line . . . "Irish" Micky Ward in stride.

Go . . . Ken Norton officially starts race of celebrity boxers and runners.

INDUCTION CEREMONY

A Moment in Time . . . Qawi, Peltz, Nelson, Zaragoza, Palomino, and Christodoulou proudly display their rings.

BOXING CARD SHOW

A Collector's Dream . . . Boxing memorabilia for fans. The world's only all-boxing show draws collectors from throughout the world.

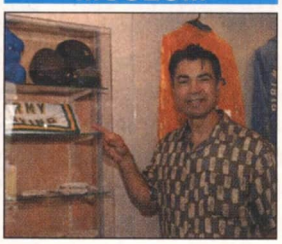
GOLF TOURNAMENT

Chip . . . Gerry Cooney (l) chips onto 18th green while Sir Henry Cooper (r) is enroute to next tee.

COCKTAIL PARTY

Stars . . . Boxers and fans enjoy VIP cocktail party reception.

MUSEUM

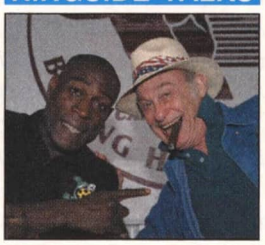


Carlos Palomino points to his boxing robe on display.

WORKOUT SESSIONS

Antonio Tarver working the heavy bag during a public workout.

RINGSIDE TALKS



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HEAVYWEIGHT HO-HUM

Five Hours, Five Fights, 50 Rounds No Stars

By Nigel Collins

PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

It's getting to be a tradition. Once a year Don King throws together a card featuring a hodge-podge of fighters from his vast stable in a marathon pay-per-view show. None of the fights are PPV worthy on their own, but together they create a gaudy enough package that King can fob it off as a major show.

In 2003, it was Bernard Hopkins and a cast of thousands at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. This holiday season, King concocted a heavyweight potboiler he christened "Rendezvous With Destiny: Battle For Supremacy," which a number of wags quickly renamed "Battle For Mediocrity."

Still, a crowd announced at 12,777 turned up at Madison Square Garden to see a 10-bout show scheduled for a grand total of 90 rounds. King's hope was that one of the heavyweight suspects would emerge as an attraction capable of rivaling Vitali Klitschko, who is one of the few top heavyweights not aligned with King.

The way things turned out, the fights ended up having little effect on any of the fighters' status, which is surprising when you consider that five of the eight men in the four televised fights were rated among THE RING's top-10 heavyweights going in and were still rated when it was all over.

The impression going in was that it was a modestly talented lot at best, and this impression was reinforced by what transpired at the Garden. Perhaps the most fitting name for the card would have been "Battle To Maintain The Status Quo."

DaVARRYL WILLIAMSON vs. OLIVER McCALL

Setting The Stage: While not expected to have the slightest significance on the heavyweight hierarchy, the non-televised match between Williamson and McCall still held a modicum of interest due to a couple of factors: a) McCall's checkered past and the fact that he is one of only two men to beat Lennox Lewis, and b) Williamson's respectable performance against Wladimir Klitschko the previous month. That one ended in a fifth-round technical decision win for Klitschko after an accidental clash of heads opened up the Ukrainian's eyebrow. Although it was another setback for Williamson, he'd floored Klitschko in the fourth and was ahead on one judge's scorecard. The fight was clearly starting to swing in his direction when it came to an abrupt halt.

Unfortunately, McCall will be best remembered for his emotional meltdown in the second Lewis fight, in February 1997. It's one of those bizarre events you just don't forget. And although he'd been flying under most people's radar since then, McCall had actually gone unbeaten in 14 bouts since his infamous rematch. The only win of any consequence was a knockout of Henry Akinwande in November '01. Otherwise, the 39-year-old McCall's comeback has been dogged by drug and legal problems.

What Happened: Even though Williamson has some kick in his right hand—remember how the younger Klitschko pitched over as if hit with an ax handle when "Touch Of Sleep" brushed him—his beard is not much better than Wladimir's, so the Denver-based journeyman wisely decided to box against the still dangerous McCall. His fight plan was simple: jab and move, grab on when McCall got too close

for comfort, and maybe splice in some powershots if the opportunity presents itself.

For the most part, Williamson's strategy worked. He kept his legs moving, changed direction frequently enough to avoid being trapped, and pumped out a steady stream of jabs. McCall, 233, chugged forward, looking to land something big. "The Atomic Bull" is still a menacing presence, but his attack lacked the energy required to chase down his fresher and faster rival.

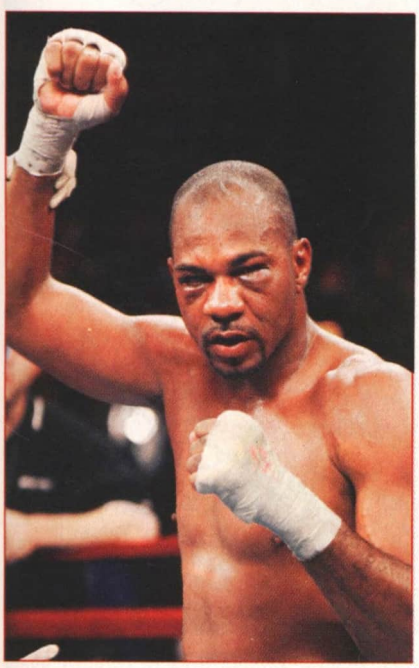
While it was hardly scintillating stuff, they gave an honest effort, doing the best they could with what they had to work with, and by the late rounds both were showing the signs of battle. McCall's right eye was swollen, while Williamson, 220, was marked around both orbs.

They exchanged solid rights in the ninth, and Williamson flurried with a cluster of combinations in the final round. McCall kept plugging away and landed a hard right at the bell, but by then he needed a knockout to win.

The unanimous decision went to Williamson by scores of 97-94 (the same as THE RING) and 96-94 (twice).

Grade: C

Both McCall and Williamson landed hard punches in their off-TV 10-rounder. But Williamson's fresher legs and edge in speed allowed him to box his way to a unanimous decision over the former WBC king.



Williamson squints at the camera through a pair of severely swollen eyes. It was a good win for the man who calls himself "Touch Of Sleep," but it didn't come easy. As is evident, the aging McCall can still inflict damage.

The Big Winner: Williamson, 21-3 (17), did the smart thing by taking this potentially hazardous match in the wake of his near miss against Klitschko. It was well worth the risk and it kept his name in the news and him in the mix. Even though the one-round kayo loss to Joe Mesi revealed his limitations, Williamson can earn decent money on the fringes and perhaps even pull a few surprises.

The Big Loser: McCall, 41-8 (30), is one of the biggest wastes of talent in the past few decades. With his kayo punch, granite chin, and offbeat persona, he should have had a much better career. But his personal problems have taken a far greater toll than any ring opponent, and time has passed him by.

Other Winners & Losers: There is bound to be a difference of opinion as to whether or not the fans and media members who showed up early enough to watch this one were winners or losers. But at least it was a reasonably competitive fight compared to King's other five prelims and helped fill time until the televised portion of the show started. Sometimes boxing fans have to be grateful for small blessings.

LARRY DONALD vs. EVANDER HOLYFIELD

Setting The Stage: Cue the sad music.

During the buildup, Holyfield mentioned how he was returning to the scene of his pro debut, 20 years earlier, in an effort to kick-start his crumbling career. But for those of us who recall that glorious "Night Of Gold" at the Garden in November '84, when Holyfield and a star-studded group of U.S. Olympians turned pro, having the washed-up legend back inside the Garden ring was no cause for celebration.

The 42-year-old Holyfield came into the match with Donald having won only two of his last seven starts. It was hard to find a single person outside of Holyfield and his camp who thought the "Holy Warrior" had a prayer of winning, even against a light-punching underachiever like Donald. That's how far down the hill Holyfield has slid.

If anybody wondered why King continues to promote the erstwhile "Real Deal," they got their answer when the crowd gave the faded ex-champ a rousing reception. Yes, he's still a sentimental favorite and still sells tickets. The suspicion is that King was hoping for a miracle so that he could possibly turn a buck promoting a third Holyfield-Tyson fight.

It's times like this that being a boxing fan can make you feel dirty.

What Happened: Things turned out as expected: Donald, taller, quicker, and younger (by eight years), stayed a step or two ahead of Holyfield and piled up points with his jab. Holyfield trudged after him, but his reflexes have slowed to such a degree that he could never really unload with any consistency.

Some old fighters can roll back the calendar for a round or two and still beat a lot of guys. Holyfield used to be among them, but not anymore. Against Donald, he couldn't

even conjure up the old magic for 30 seconds, much less long enough to do any serious work. The crowd tried to lift him from time to time by chanting "Ho-lee-field ... Ho-lee-field," but they might as well have been whistling "Dixie" for all the good it did. As always, the heart was willing, but it's been a long time since the rest of his body could keep pace with that magnificent organ.

As the fight progressed and it became obvious to Donald, 226, that Holyfield, 215, was no threat whatsoever, the Cincinnati boxer began to put a straight right behind his jab. Holyfield swung back wildly, but most of the time he caught nothing but the stale Garden air.

It was so one-sided that none of the judges gave Holyfield a round after the third. Donald never came close to dropping him, but all those punches bouncing off of Holyfield's bald head only added to the damage already inflicted in his 47 previous pro outings. It was a sad sight indeed, akin to watching an old pal get tortured for 36 minutes. In a way, it was a pity Donald didn't have the power or the inclination to put him out of his misery early.

Donald had no trouble beating the 42-year-old Holyfield to the punch throughout the fight. He started by snapping left jabs into the faded ex-champ's face (top), but once he realized Holyfield had nothing to offer, Donald began to mix in powerpunches (above).

The official scoring of 119-109 (Melvina Lathan and Wynn Kintz) and 118-109 (Bob Gilson) were backed up by Holyfield's pathetic punchstats. According to CompuBox, the 78 punches Holyfield landed in the 12-rounder was his lowest in the 24 bouts of his that the punch-counting outfit has tracked.

Grade: D-

The Big Winner: "Big" is relative here, but Donald, 41-3-2 (24), now has a win over an all-time great, and we suppose that has to count for something. The victor certainly thought so.

"Evander is still a great champion," said Donald. "I didn't look at him as being too old."

And we thought Holyfield was the one in denial.

The Big Loser: Boxing!

Any time the sport allows a totally shot fighter to compete, it diminishes the game. And when it's a high-profile figure such as Holyfield, the shame is only magnified.

The week after the fight, the New York State Athletic Commission placed Holyfield on indefinite medical suspension.

"To my practiced mind, Holyfield shouldn't be fighting anymore," NYSAC chairman Ron Scott Stevens told the *New York Daily News*. "It's the responsibility of the state athletic commission to save a boxer from himself. Evander Holyfield has absorbed enough punishment throughout his great career. It's time the bleeding stopped."

Holyfield's reaction was typical, and underlined the fact that he still doesn't get it.

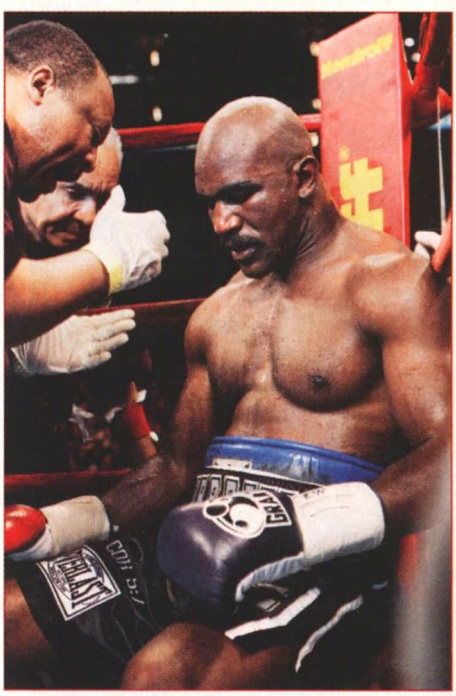
"Why do they want to usher me out?" he asked. "What have I done to this game that they don't want me anymore?"

At the risk of putting too fine a point on it, Evander, you've already stayed too long and we want you out before you turn into another Muhammad Ali. Is that clear enough?

Other Winners & Losers: Kudos to Holyfield's former trainer Don Turner for trying to talk some sense into his client before declining to work with him anymore. It would have been a nice payday for Turner, but he put his fighter's health in front of his bank account. That's rare in boxing ... Ronnie Shields, who accepted the assignment that Turner turned down, was not as noble. Maybe he can't afford to be, but it's tough to swallow his if-I-don't-train-him-someone-else-will justification ... Finally, where was Stevens and the rest of the NYSAC *before* the travesty? Maybe their hands were tied legally, but was it really necessary to wait until after Holyfield had taken 260 punches from Donald before taking action?

HASIM RAHMAN vs. KALI MEEHAN

Setting The Stage: Rahman is apparently one of those fighters who handles the climb better than the view from the top. He did little but takes bows



Trainer Ronnie Shields tries to verbally pump some life into a weary Holyfield, but Commander Vander simply didn't have enough fight left in him to get the job done. The week following the fight, the New York State Athletic Commission suspended his boxing license.

In the fourth round, a charged-up Rahman backed Meehan into a corner with his jab (top) and then opened up with a prolonged barrage of powershots (above) that devastated the New Zealander and forced his corner to call a halt.

and talk trash after winning the heavyweight championship from Lewis in 2001, and was unceremoniously relieved of the title via one-punch kayo in the rematch. Since then he's lost big fights to Holyfield and John Ruiz, drew with David Tua, and generally seemed in decline. But following the decision loss to Ruiz in December '03, "The Rock" returned to the club circuit in an effort to retool and rebuild. Four wins later, he found himself back in the big time. He got there the hard way. Good for him.

Meehan, a relatively unknown New Zealander, had garnered the spot with a moral victory over Lamon Brewster in September '04. The hard-hitting but lethargic Brewster won an unpopular split decision, but it was Meehan who won the crowd and earned the media's plaudits. He was big and game, and so what if he couldn't fight much. He almost beat Brewster, didn't he?

What Happened: A fired up Rahman needed only four rounds of the scheduled 12 to bludgeon Meehan into defeat and reestablish himself as a title threat. It wasn't so much that he beat Meehan; that was expected. It was the way he did it—ruthlessly and with extreme prejudice.

Rahman, a fairly lean looking 232, went right after his man, working his way inside behind a battering ram jab and then firing his heavy right hand whenever he got in range, which was often. He certainly had a big enough target in the 239-pound, 6'5" Meehan, who could do little but bravely absorb a brutal beating.

After punishing Meehan and bloodying his nose with a steady assault over the first three rounds, Rahman pinned his prey in a corner in the fourth and unleashed a lethal barrage of right hands. This was caveman stuff. At one point, Meehan took approximately 20 unanswered blows, as his head snapped first one way and then another. But he stayed upright, sometimes hanging on to the top rope with one hand for support.

Referee Eddie Cotton allowed the hellish bombardment to continue right up until the bell, by which time, according to CompuBox, Rahman connected with 47 of 61 powershots in the fourth round alone. A woozy Meehan staggered back to his corner, and his trainer wisely called it off then and there, which gave Rahman a TKO victory at the end of the fourth.

Grade: C+

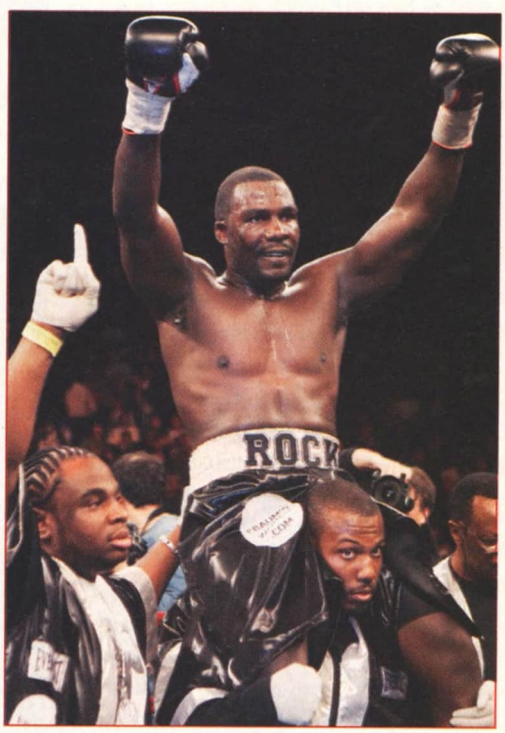
The Big Winner: When the marathon card was finally over in the early hours of Sunday morning, you went away with the feeling that if anybody on the show had a shot at becoming world champion, it was Rahman. True, Meehan wasn't a particularly stern test, and, yes, Rahman, 40-5-1 (32), has his faults. But the ex-champ displayed far more vitality than he did against Holyfield, Ruiz, and Tua. And an in-shape, inspired Rahman is still a handful for any of today's heavyweights.

"I am in the best position in heavyweight boxing now," crowed Rahman afterward.

That might be a bit of a stretch, but he's certainly positioned well (number three in THE RING ratings) and seems, at least for the time being, to have rediscovered his hunger.

The Big Loser: Meehan, 29-3 (23), seemed poised to make a bit of a splash after almost beating Brewster, but he won only once in his three-fight U.S. campaign in 2004, and it seems highly unlikely he will ever become much of a factor. He's a willing sort, but lacks the skills and athleticism to hang with the best.

Other Winners & Losers: King made out okay. He now has at least one heavyweight in his sizable collection capable of making a pleasing fight and maybe also selling a few tickets … Brewster wound up a loser even though he wasn't on the show. His close call against Meehan looks even



Rahman and his team celebrate his TKO of Meehan. It was "The Rock's" most invigorating outing in some time. Even though his opponent wasn't the toughest of tests, it was Rahman who emerged from the lengthy show with the most aesthetically pleasing performance.

McCline's colossal size advantage is clearly evident in this shot of him on the attack against Byrd. But as the fight reached the latter stages, "Big Time's" bulk began to work against him and he faded down the stretch.

worse now that Rahman has exposed Meehan as little more than a big target ... And what was ref Cotton waiting for in the fourth round? For Meehan's head to fly into the third row? Yes, refs can be losers too.

CHRIS BYRD vs. JAMEEL McCLINE

Setting The Stage: Most of the prefight publicity revolved around the fact that Byrd and McCline are buddies and that their wives like to go shopping together. How many pay-per-views that warm and fuzzy nugget sold is open to question, but at least we know where the purse money is going.

Friendship aside, because of McCline's considerable size advantage (6'6", 270 pounds compared to Byrd's 6', 214 pounds) there was a measure of intrigue. Factor in Byrd's two previous fights, a controversial decision over Fres Oquendo and a draw with Andrew Golota, and there was an outside chance that the IBF belt would change hands.

What Happened: The size difference was almost comical, and following a perfunctory opening round, McCline stepped up his attack in the second, cornered Byrd on the ropes, and unloaded a series of wicked-looking haymakers, all of which went flying harmlessly over the top of his buddy's ducking head. Then McCline fired a right hand that snaked around Byrd's defenses, clipped him near the ear, and sent him tumbling to the canvas. Byrd was buzzed but beat referee Wayne Kelly's count, and the bell rang before McCline could inflict any more damage.

"I can't believe it happened," said Byrd. "He came at me really hard and hit me with a perfect shot."

"Big Time" tried to finish the job in the early moments of the third, and when Byrd fired back, it resulted in pleasing two-way action. All three judges gave the session to the challenger, and McCline landed a long right hand to the head in the fourth to take his third consecutive round on THE RING's scorecard.

That McCline, Byrd, and their wives are all good friends outside of the ring didn't stop the husbands from trying to take the other's head off. After falling behind early, Byrd punched his way back into the fight and, as is usually the case, scored well with his southpaw jab.

Despite his reputation as a defensive fighter, Byrd outpunched McCline in the latter stages, stringing together rapid-fire combinations that stalled McCline's advance and piled up points for the defending titleholder. The last two rounds clinched the victory for Byrd.

By the fifth, Byrd seemed to have fully recovered from the knockdown, and as his punch output increased, McCline's declined. By the eighth, Byrd was putting together bursts of five and six punches that tormented his chum like a swarm of wasps. This particular David wasn't going to win with a single stone, but Goliath was starting to breathe hard.

McCline still came up with a hard shot from time to time, and in the 10th he pinned Byrd on the ropes and delivered a series of withering left hooks to the body. It proved, however, to be his last offensive surge. Byrd rallied back in the 11th, visibly hurting McCline for the first time with pinpoint combinations to the head. It was a big round for Byrd, and he joyfully raised his arms, a look of boyish delight on his face, as he walked back to his corner.

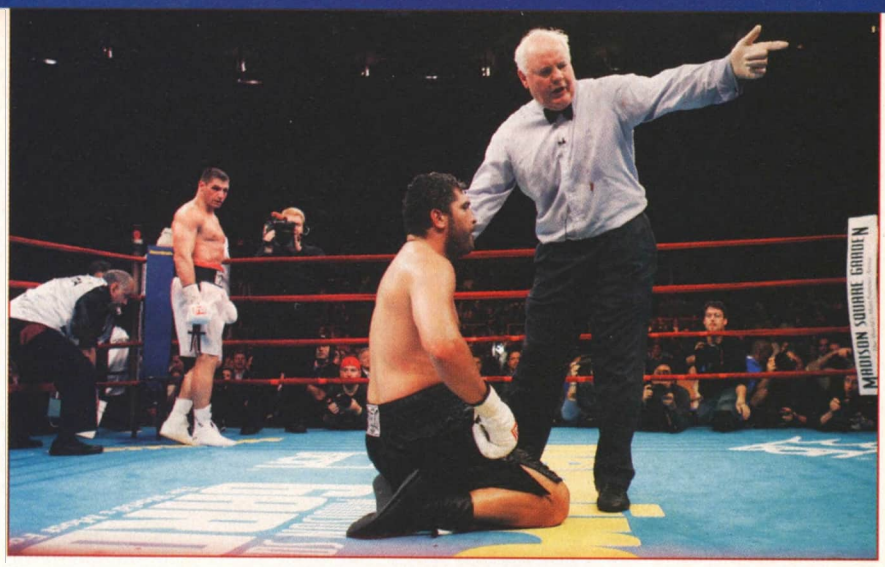
Byrd continued to pepper the weary McCline in the last round, and it was a bit of a surprise when judge Glen Feldman handed in a 114-112 tally in McCline's favor. Thankfully, judges Don Trella and Luis Rivera got it right, giving the decision to Byrd by scores of 115-112 and 114-113, respectively. THE RING had Byrd up 115-113 thanks to his strong finish, in which, according to CompuBox, he outlanded McCline 70 to 25 in the final two rounds.

Grade: C+

The Big Winner: It was Byrd's best performance in a couple of years. It reinforced his position as the number-one contender and strengthened his claim to a shot at the Vitali Klitschko-Danny Williams winner. But he did little to convince anybody he would win.

The Big Loser: The critics who still won't give Byrd, 38-2-1 (20), his props are being pigheaded. Okay, the guy is never going to make people forget a primetime Mike Tyson, but he's very skillful, shows plenty of heart against much larger and harder-punching men, and since he's slowed down half a step and is slightly easier to hit, his fights are generally entertaining.

Other Winners & Losers: McCline, 31-4-3 (19), lost, but he fought well, so in a limited sense he also walked away a winner … You can also slap the loser label on those that insist that there's no longer a place in the heavyweight division for somebody Byrd's size. McCline had 56 pounds on him, most of it muscle, but in the end, McCline's bulk was more of a hindrance than a help, as he grew tired trying to maneuver around the ring quickly enough to catch his lighter and consequently speedier opponent.



Referee Randy Neumann counts over Ruiz after Golota dumped him with a counter right in the second round. Although it was a crisp punch, the WBA titleholder seemed more surprised than hurt.

JOHN RUIZ vs. ANDREW GOLOTA

Setting The Stage: File this one under Forbidden Pleasures. Two big bruisers, better know for their nefarious tactics than the artistry of their game, going foul-for-foul in what promised to be one of the dirtiest fights since Fritzie Zivic took on Bummy Davis in 1940.

Ruiz, in his second term as WBA titleholder, had rebounded well from his embarrassing loss to Roy Jones with solid victories over Rahman and Oquendo. That hadn't made him any more popular, but even "The Quiet Man's" most vocal critics had to begrudgingly admit that he's almost as difficult to beat as he is to watch.

Golota, an even more infamous character, with a long history of reprehensible episodes, had earned the opportunity by holding Byrd to a fairly entertaining draw in April '04. It was one of Golota's best performances and raised hope that perhaps this troubled man was finally ready to live up to his potential, which had heretofore been stifled by his unstable emotional state. Lucky he wasn't fighting McCall; the NYSAC

In between all the clinching and dirty stuff, Golota and Ruiz exchanged a good number of hard blows. According to CompuBox, they landed 273 punches all told, 152 for Golota, 121 for Ruiz.

Despite the knockdown he suffered and the point he was penalized, Ruiz mounted a strong finish, landing enough powerpunches, including this right, to close the gap and overtake Golota in the so-called championship rounds. Having his trainer ejected appeared to spur Ruiz on.

might have needed a ringside shrink instead of a physician.

Adding to the madcap nature of the match were Golota's rowdy fans, who can usually be counted on to get involved in some alcohol-fueled high jinks. Put all the elements together and there was a measure of expectation going into this one that had little to do with the Marquess of Queensberry.

What Happened: The bout opened with a scowling Ruiz charging out of his corner and quickly connecting with a few shots before Golota had a chance to collect himself. Like clockwork, this was immediately followed with the first of many impromptu fistfights in the crowd. These unscheduled altercations kept up pretty much throughout the bout and definitely gave the proceedings an extra layer of menace.

Ruiz, a pound heavier at 239, was still pressing in the second when Golota countered with a straight right hand that caught the onrushing titleholder square on the chin and deposited him on the canvas. Ruiz was still dazed when he regained his feet, and shortly thereafter Golota bowled him over again and then popped him with another shot while Ruiz sat on the canvas. Referee Randy Neumann, who once wrote an article for *The New York Times* on fighting dirty, acted as if no foul had been committed, and merely administered another eight-count.

The two knockdowns gave Golota a three-point advantage for the round, and when Neumann penalized Ruiz a point for hitting behind the head in the third, the titleholder found himself in an even deeper hole.

But Golota made two basic mistakes that helped Ruiz get back in the fight: First, following his success in the second round, he went right-hand crazy, and to make matters even worse, he failed to set up his powerpunches with the jab. The punch that dropped Ruiz had been instinctive, but as soon as Golota started thinking knockout, his technique went to hell. Still, at the end of six rounds, Golota was ahead on all cards.

"I knew I was behind and I had to work really hard to have this win," admitted Ruiz.

And work hard he did, especially down the stretch when he won four of the final five rounds on THE RING's card. In between exchanging rabbit punches, clearly the *foul du jour*, Ruiz did some good work. Ironically, the turning point came in the eighth round when Ruiz' confrontational trainer, Norman Stone, was given the heave-ho by Neumann.

"Stoney" is perpetually on the verge of blowing his top for one reason or another, and had been verbally abusing Neumann all night, and when the ref called a time out to fix the loose tape on Ruiz' glove, the volatile trainer handed the tape to the ref and told him to do it himself. It didn't seem to be as grievous a trespass as some of Stone's other antics that night, but Neumann had had enough, and moments later MSG security was ushering the trainer out of the arena.

Ironically, the incident seemed to spur on Ruiz, and he rocked Golota with a flush right to the head in the ninth and proceeded to get the better of a spirited exchange. He slammed left hooks and right hands into Golota's head, opening a cut over the transplanted Pole's right eye. Golota came back with some lefts early in the 10th, but was outworked by Ruiz in the final two rounds.

As predicted, it had been ugly and not a little dirty, with way too many clinches. But overall, it was not as unbearable to watch as some have said.

Much to the dismay of Golota's embattled fans, who had staged skirmishes with Ruiz' followers throughout the fight, the Puerto Rican from Methuen, Massachusetts, was awarded a unanimous decision by scores of 114-111 (Tom Shreck and Oscar Perez) and 113-112 (Frank Lombardi). THE RING had it even, 114-114.

Grade: B-

The Big Winner: Say what you will about him, Ruiz, 41-5-1 (28), just keeps lumbering along. Sure, his success has a lot to do with the mediocre quality of the current crop of heavies, but there's no getting around the fact that despite his unappealing style, he has some positive qualities—durability, above-average power, a style that's tough to solve, and an obstinate kind of courage that's often overlooked.

The Big Loser: Golota, 38-5-1 (31), has now come up a bit short in consecutive attempts to win an alphabet belt, drawing with Byrd and losing narrowly to Ruiz. He showed in both bouts that he still has something left, but prior to the Ruiz fight he spoke of going back into retirement if he lost. In the immediate aftermath, he seemed ambivalent.

"I thought I won the fight," said a disappointed Golota. "I am confused. I boxed well. I don't agree that he beat me."

Golota's attitude is understandable, but his second-half fade gave Ruiz the opportunity to catch up and, to his credit, he did.

Other Winners & Losers: Stone was both a winner and a loser. Although he was fined $1,000 and suspended for 60 days, he did the right thing and issued an apology, saying, "I want to specifically apologize to referee Randy Neumann, the officials of the NYSAC, and boxing fans in general. I'm sorry my better judgment was overcome by my emotions and it will never happen again." Want to bet? ... Perhaps the biggest losers of the night were the morons who got into a rumble with members of the Marine Corps color guard midway into the Ruiz-Golota bout. Only in boxing. ■

THE 10 GREATEST TITLE REIGNS OF ALL-TIME

Becoming Champion Is Only The Beginning

By William Dettloff

One of the complaints lodged most often against the fight game these days is that there are too many champions. "Anyone can be a champ nowadays," guys like to say. They're right, but they're not. It is easier to win a "title," but what matters is what a fighter does with it. Will his reign be over before we get to know him, or will we recall it 10 years after he's gone? And what makes a title reign memorable? For that matter, which have been the best?

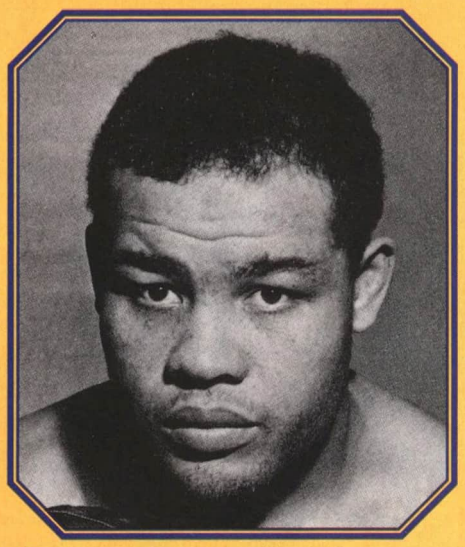
In this special section, THE RING lists the 10 best title reigns in the modern history of the sport. How we arrive at our conclusions is important, but first a warning: There is a clear distinction between what defines a great fighter and a great champion; the latter produces an exemplary championship reign. The former may or may not. One can be both, but it is not a given. For myriad reasons, many of the greatest heroes in our sport did not acquit themselves as well as champions as they did as fighters. It's no crime.

Perhaps they liked to hop from one weight class to another, inspired more by the prospect of multiple championships than by a single one that's long and well defended. Maybe they preferred the excitement and riches of bigger fights to the relative monotony of cleaning out a division. Maybe the getting was more fun than the keeping. It happens.

Whatever the case, you won't find here the title reigns of Sugar Ray Robinson or Harry Greb or Ray Leonard or Rocky Marciano or Julio Cesar Chavez. They've been in all the other analyses we've done. Not this one.

Here's another difference between this piece and ones like it that have come before: We include active fighters here. The reason is that any active champion who has made enough title defenses and reigned for long enough to compete with this group deserves to be here. Period. Now, on to the process.

We picked 30 of the longest and best reigns ever and assigned them scores in five categories. Then we added up the totals, and the 10 highest scores made up our winners. The categories: length of reign and number of defenses, whose values are added together (the length of the reign is rounded to the nearest year); a score of between 1 and 10 for the quality of the challengers (one being terrible, and 10 outstanding); a score of between 1 and 5 for the champion's historical impact; and, importantly, a deduction of three points if the champion failed to unify the title during his reign. Because lots of guys have won titles, but the ones that unified and turned the reign into something more deserve credit for it. On the following pages they get it.

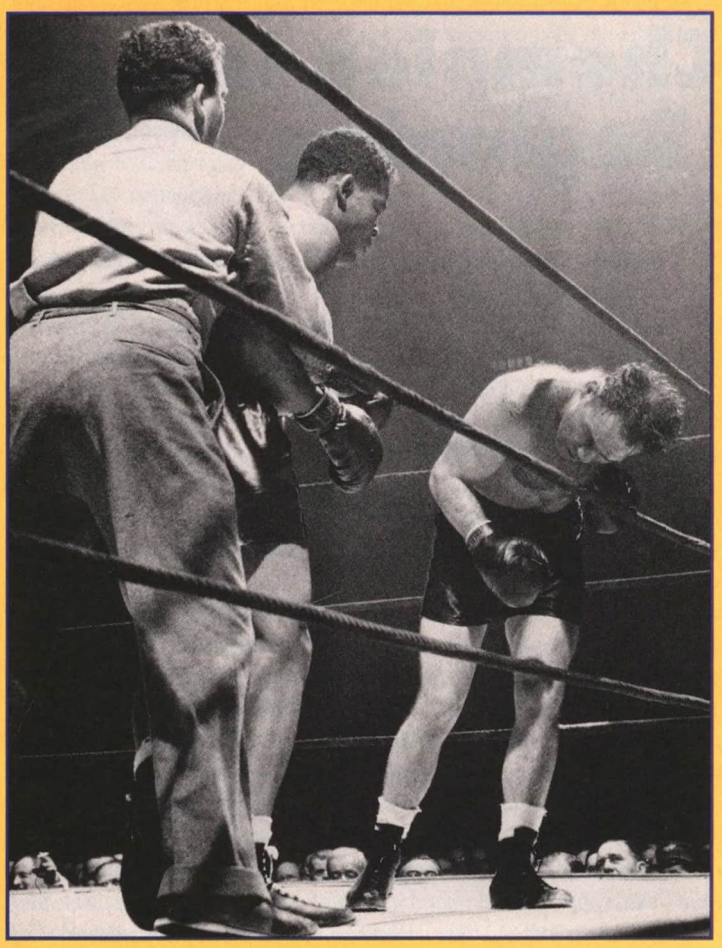


1
JOE LOUIS
Heavyweight, 1937-1948

Length	**12 years**
Defenses	**25**
Challengers	**5**
Impact	**5**
Total	**47**

Louis' long stay at the top of the heavyweight division was the obvious choice here, one of the few times we can recall where a winner arrived at intuitively also is supported by the data. Still, there are things about Louis' reign that get lost in the legend and thus deserve attention.

First, it is true that Louis' title reign lasted 11 years 7 months, the longest ever in any weight class. But between his March 1942 defense against Abe Simon and his June 1946 rematch with Billy Conn, Louis was inactive because of World War II. He fought countless exhibitions during that time, but didn't defend the title for four years. (For perspective, that's longer than Muhammad Ali's forced exile from the game 20 years later). Putting aside sentiment, and for the purposes of historical accuracy and this analysis, shouldn't we view the title as vacant for that four-year stretch?

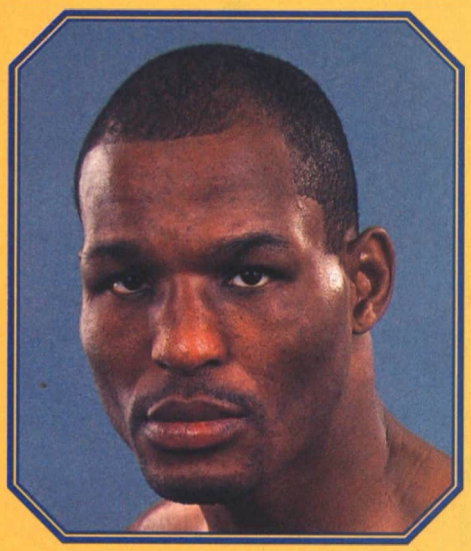


The referee rescues Red Burman from Louis' onslaught

Guess what. It doesn't matter. Subtract those four years from Louis' reign and his total score drops from 47 to 43, still enough to place him at the top of this analysis by a wide margin. And, his defense against Simon was already his 21st. He made just four more after the war ended, meaning he'd already done the bulk of his work when the war began.

The quality of Louis' challengers also merits discussion. It should be said first that a long career inevitably results in fights against mediocre opponents. And it can't be denied: Louis' era was a very poor one for heavyweights. His "Bum Of The Month" tour was aptly named and with the exceptions of Max Schmeling, Jersey Joe Walcott, and Billy Conn, no one really stands out. Lou Nova, Tony Galento, Bob Pastor, Nathan Mann, Buddy Baer? No dice. As a group, they merit just 5 out of a possible 10, and you could argue that down if you were so inclined (Walcott and Schmeling were older, Conn was a light heavyweight, etc). We are not; Louis' greatness requires that he get the benefit of the doubt.

Louis shines in the Historical Impact category. Maybe a half-dozen athletes and perhaps two prize fighters (Jack Johnson and Ali) carry as much weight historically as does Louis. His influence as a prize fighter, an early African-American folk hero, and an important (if primarily symbolic) political figure during World War II is still felt today, more than a half-century after his last fight. He gets a 5 in this category and if we could give him more than that we would.



2
BERNARD HOPKINS
Middleweight, 1995-present

Length	**10**
Defenses	**19**
Challengers	**6**
Impact	**3.5**
Total	**38.5**

We can hear the gasping at this one, especially among the old-timers. "In this age of diluted titles and half-ass fighters, how can a guy have the second greatest reign ever?" Calm down. Take a breath. Sure, titles don't mean as much. And maybe on average the fighters aren't as good. But Hopkins is in the midst of the second greatest reign in the modern history of the sport—and he has the numbers to prove it.

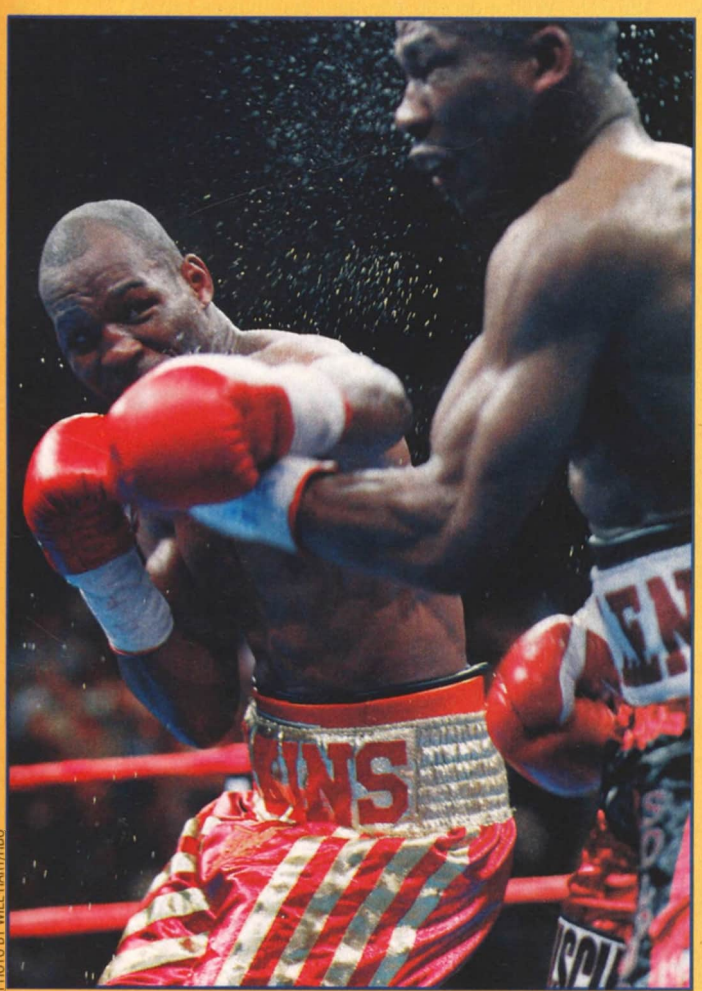


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Hopkins blasts Robert Allen, who has failed in three bids to take the title

Consider: Hopkins has been a champion for almost 10 years. He's outlasted and out-performed all of his contemporaries, including Evander Holyfield, Oscar De La Hoya, Mike Tyson, Lennox Lewis, and Roy Jones. Yes, Jones and De La Hoya won titles in multiple divisions, and Holyfield slew bigger dragons.

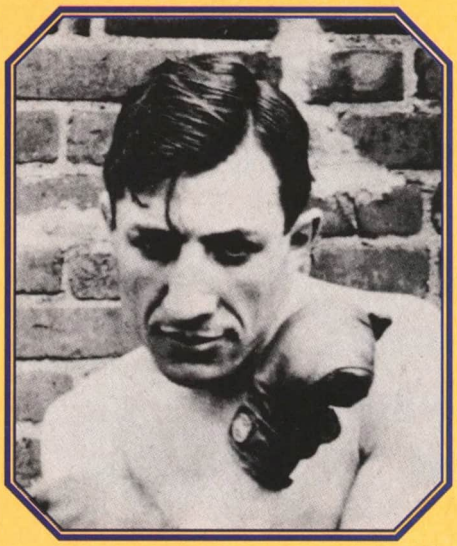
But Hopkins has reigned as a champion for longer than any of them and made more title defenses; the only one who comes close is Jones if you add up all the defenses he made in the four divisions in which he won titles—and he still falls short. Plus, Hopkins unified the title. That's big. But just on longevity and volume he gets to second, and before you say volume isn't everything, don't worry—we're getting there.

Hopkins gets a 6 for the quality of his challengers, and if not for what he's done in the last three years, it wouldn't even be that. The middleweight division has been terrible for about as long as Hopkins has ruled it. In 10 years, no one will remember Andrew Council or Joe Lipsey or Bo James. And if Hopkins had suddenly lost the title or retired in 2000, you might have forgotten him already too.

But Hopkins got lucky in '01 when Felix Trinidad, a lock for the Hall of Fame, moved up and challenged him, and Hopkins took him apart. Same with De La Hoya last September. There aren't a lot of guys on this list who successfully defended against two Hall of Famers. (And before you complain that the middleweight De La Hoya was unproven, stop; we give the same benefit of the doubt to Carlos Monzon's defense against Jose Napoles, for example, and Louis' against Conn, so everyone's graded on the same scale.)

Trinidad and De La Hoya make up for a lot of Vanderpools, Hakkars, and Danielses.

That Hopkins holds the division record for title defenses and is doing what he's doing at 40 years old gets him a score of 3.5 for Historical Impact. You could argue it higher. It doesn't matter. Here's what does: He's not done yet.



3
ABE ATTELL
Featherweight, 1906-1912

Length	**6**
Defenses	**20**
Challengers	**6**
Impact	**4**
Total	**36**

Modern fans are always suspicious of fighters who did their work around the turn of the century and before. You can't blame them; there's very little film available. What film there is usually reveals a lot of mauling and clinching and little in the way of skilled boxing as we know it. It's hard to track down opponent records. Old newspaper accounts often are unreliable because half of the reporters were on the take. Fixes were commonplace at the very highest level of the sport.

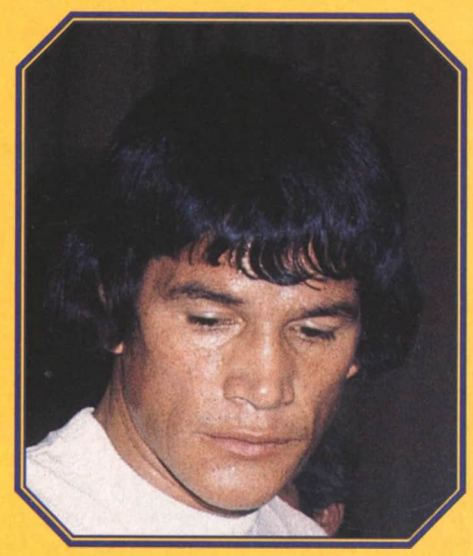
All of those things are true of the era in which Attell fought, and the best available evidence suggests that several of Attell's fights weren't on the level. Guess what. His reign belongs here anyway. Though most historians agree that several of his fights were fixed, they agree too that they were limited primarily to non-title fights; indeed, his record is dotted with incongruous results that occurred mostly between title fights: a 1904 kayo loss to Tommy Sullivan; an '06 disqualification win over Tony Moran; another later the same year over Frank Carsey; and a 15-round draw with Battling Nelson in '08. There are others.

The fights that raise serious suspicion are a pair of title fight draws with challenger Owen Moran, which many recorded at the time to have been dominated by the challenger. But in the absence of any damning evidence, we have to assume the results were not illegitimate, but simply controversial; not unlike Muhammad Ali's points wins over Ken Norton in their rubber match, or Ali's win over Jimmy Young, both of which today are credited as legitimate title defenses for Ali. So Attell gets credit for the Moran fights.

That unpleasantness out of the way, we're free to examine Attell's title reign, and it is impressive in its depth. Twenty defenses over a six-year reign works out to a little better than three a year, a rate that was not uncommon for the time. Like most champions of the era, Attell engaged in many more non-title than title fights, and during his reign he fought 77 times. Like others who appear here, he was a busier fighter than champion, but it wasn't like he was avoiding anyone. How could he, fighting 77 times?

Attell's challengers made up a solid enough lot for the period: Moran, Kid Herman, Jimmy Walsh, Kid Solomon, Harry Baker, Freddie Weeks, Frank White. All were experienced, veteran contenders of the day, and as much as Attell is covered negatively in the history books, no one writes that he ducked anyone. No, it wasn't the featherweight era of Willie Pep and Sandy Saddler. It still gets Attell a decent score and his division-record 20 consecutive title defenses wield heavy impact historically.

Attell's long reign ends against Johnny Kilbane (left) in 1912



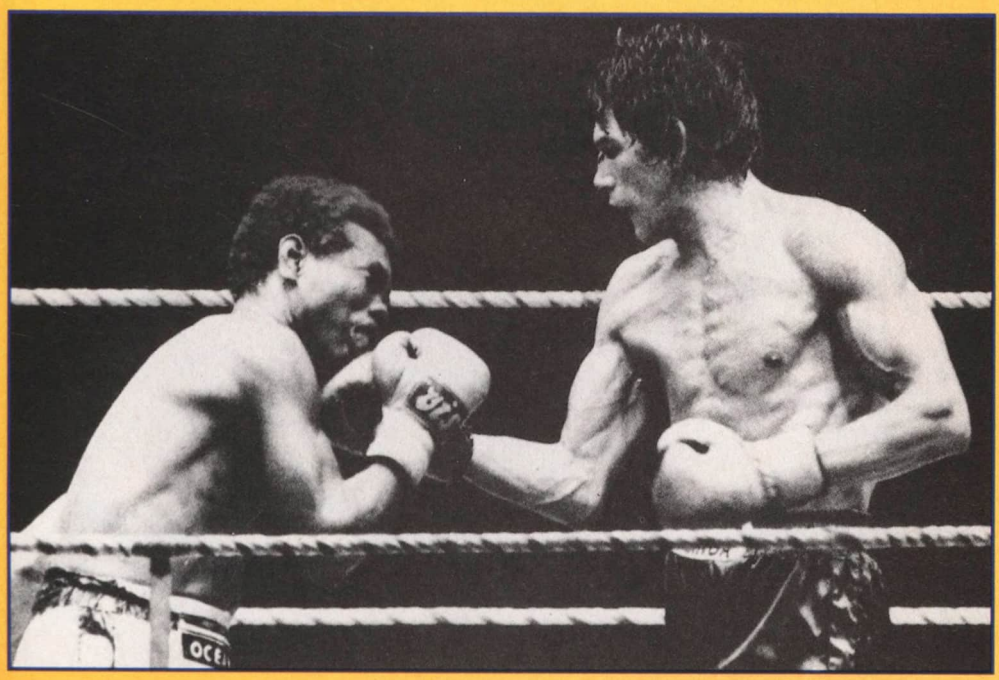
4
CARLOS MONZON
Middleweight, 1970-1977

Length	**7**
Defenses	**14**
Challengers	**8.5**
Impact	**4.5**
Total	**34**

It used to be that all you ever heard when guys talked about the great middleweight champions was Robinson and Zale and Graziano and Greb. Maybe Ketchel, if you had an old-timer along. Then Monzon came along and none of those guys could hold a candle to him when it came to steady, consistent, stoned-faced excellence at 160 pounds. Robinson, for all his brilliance, defended at 160 a grand total of four times. Same for Zale. Greb got in six defenses, the same as Ketchel. Graziano? Zip.

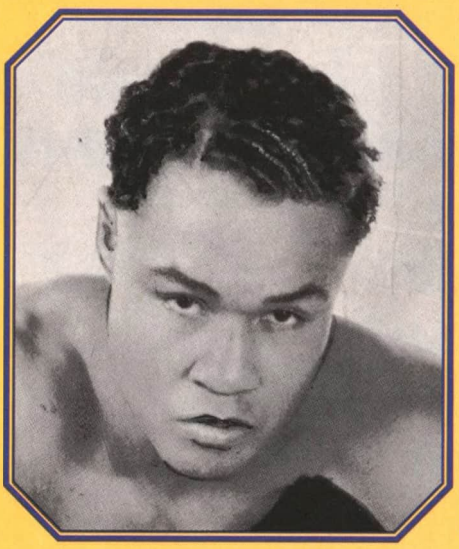
Over nearly seven years Monzon banged out one defense after another. He was no Henry Armstrong, averaging just two defenses a year, but at the end of a Monzon title defense, there was no doubt who the winner was; nine of his 14 defenses were knockout wins—and those guys were the lucky ones. The other guys were beaten slowly into submission over 15 rounds. Monzon's challengers tie for the highest score of any on the list. If you look at some of the names—Jean Claude Bottier, Gratien Tonna, Tony Mundine—you wonder why. You could be forgiven for thinking Monzon just fought a lot of Europeans, and what does it matter if he didn't beat the best American fighters?

Then you see the others on Monzon's record: Nino Benvenuti—admittedly, yes, another European, but one whose record was 82-6-1 when Monzon defended against him after beating him for the title. Emile Griffith was older but still formidable and several times a champion, and Monzon beat him twice in defense of the title, once by stoppage—one of only two times Griffith was stopped in his 111-fight career. Bennie Briscoe was a monster, and Monzon defended against him too, and twice against murderous-punching Rodrigo Valdes, who might have dominated the division had it not been for Monzon. And he tortured Jose Naples, the wonderful welterweight champion. That's some resume.



Monzon tags Rodrigo Valdez with a right in the champ's final defense before retiring on top

Monzon was undefeated for the last 13 years of his career, he retired as the undisputed champion and never attempted a comeback, and for about 25 years—until Hopkins came along and ruined it all in a much weaker division—Monzon held the division record for title defenses. What kind of champion was he? When the WBC stripped him of the title for not fighting Valdes, he defended the WBA version three times then re-unified the title against Valdes. He didn't play. He gets a 4.5 on Historical Impact, and if not for Hopkins, he'd have ranked even higher.



5
HENRY ARMSTRONG
Welterweight, 1938-1940

Length	**2**
Defenses	**19**
Challengers	**7.5**
Impact	**5**
Total	**33.5**

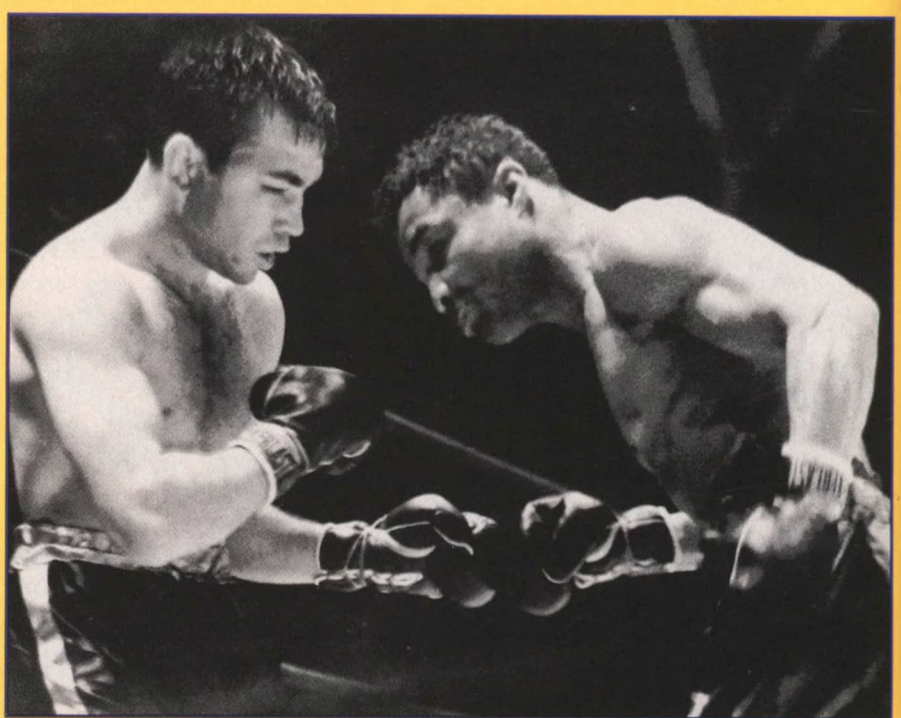
The thing that jumps out at you about Armstrong's reign is the brevity—just two years. That he crammed in 19 defenses is unthinkable to today's fans and fighters, but he did and it's one of the things that marks Armstrong as one of the great fighters ever at any weight. Think about it: It's taken Bernard Hopkins nearly 10 years to amass the same number of defenses that Armstrong cranked out in two. And it's not as though all the champions of Armstrong's era did that; they didn't. They fought a lot, but in general defended infrequently. Look it up.

It's unfortunate that in analyses like this one, Armstrong actually is penalized for his activity. If he'd taken even six years to make those 19 defenses—a very respectable three defenses per year—his total score would have moved him into third place. As it is, he falls in at fifth with big bumps coming from the remaining categories.

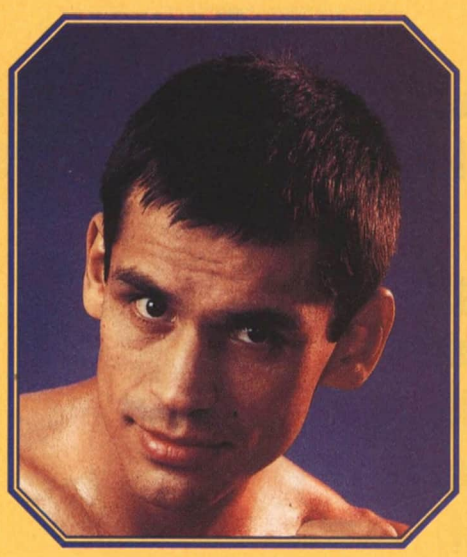
Armstrong gets a strong score of 7.5 for his challengers and it merits inspection and explanation. As we said in the introduction, no one gets credit for the fighters they faced before or after they became champions; this is about what they did during their reigns. And on that basis, Armstrong does reasonably well, having defended against a solid collection of challengers that included Ceferino Garcia, Ritchie Fontaine, and Ernie Roderick. Should those challengers get him a 7.5? Probably not.

But while Armstrong was the welterweight champion, he also beat Hall of Famer Lou Ambers in a lightweight title bout, and Baby Arizmendi and Lew Jenkins in non-title bouts. Now, those weren't title defenses. But they occurred during Armstrong's reign at 147 and all three of those guys were terrors. How do you handle it? You give him the higher score—because he deserves it for beating those guys and because it evens things out for screwing him over for fighting so often.

Armstrong wasn't the national hero that Joe Louis was, but he gets the same score for Historical Impact. Why? He remains the only fighter in history to hold titles in three weight classes simultaneously. (For perspective, try to picture Manny Pacquiao whipping Cory Spinks, dropping down to beat Jose Luis Castillo, and then going up 20 pounds and drawing with Bernard Hopkins—all within a three-year period.) Armstrong also holds the division-record for title defenses and is recognized generally as the second-best welterweight ever, right behind you-know-who. And if they had met in their primes, we're not sure it wouldn't be Armstrong at the top of the all-time pound-for-pound list.



Armstrong (right) begins his welterweight reign by beating Barney Ross



6
RICARDO LOPEZ
Strawweight, 1990-1999

Length	**9**
Defenses	**21**
Challengers	**3.5**
Impact	**2**
Partial title	**-3**
Total	**32.5**

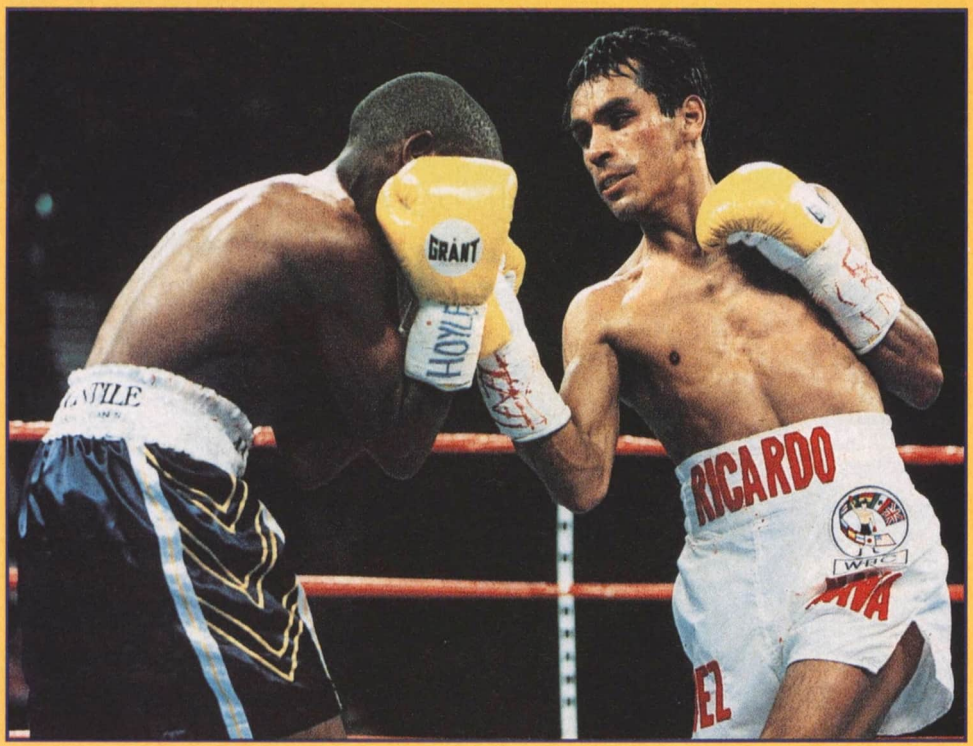
To get a sense for precisely how dominant Lopez was at 105 pounds, you only have to know that he wasn't seriously challenged until Rosendo Alvarez pushed him to the brink of defeat in their first bloody slugfest, in March 1998—eight years and 21 defenses into his championship reign. That's right. Lopez wasn't in danger of losing until he'd already made more defenses than any champion in history save for Joe Louis. That's dominant.

You want more? Of Lopez' 21 challengers, just four made it the full 12 rounds. (Remember that when Alvarez did so in their rematch, it technically wasn't a title defense for Lopez because Alvarez didn't make weight.) Those four—Kyung Yun Lee, Domingo Lucas, Kermin Guardia, and Mongkol Chareon—were sufficiently bruised, bloodied, and/or battered by the end as to remove any question around who was the superior fighter. Lopez was so much better than the guys he fought, it was very nearly unfair. There should have been some kind of handicap to make it interesting. So with all this, why isn't Lopez' reign closer to the top? There are several answers.

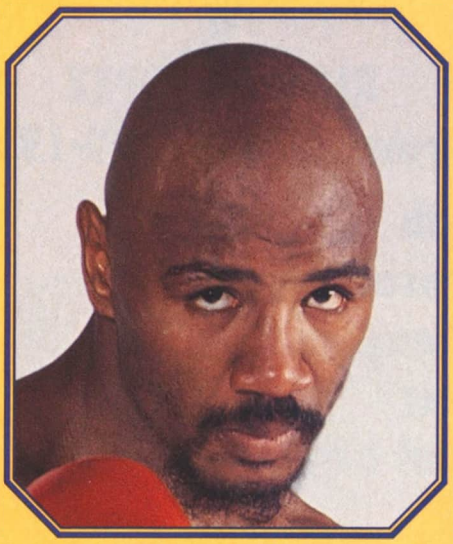
Lopez' challengers were a sorry lot and not just in comparison to him. The exceptions? Alvarez, who eventually moved up in weight and became a very dependable if flawed champion, and Saman Sorjaturong, who, after being belted out in two rounds by Lopez in 1993, went on to put together a very nice little reign as the WBC light flyweight titlist. After that, the pickings are very slim; a couple of decent pugs—Guardia, Andy Tabanas, Manny Melchor—and a whole slew you never knew and never will.

What else hurts Lopez? He never unified the title, despite clearly being the best fighter at the weight. You can say that was the work of Don King and Jose Sulaiman. Whatever. Lopez never did it and he loses three points as a result.

Finally, you'd think Lopez would do well historically if for no other reason than he retired undefeated and holds the division record for title defenses. But he doesn't score well. Why? Very few care now or ever will care about strawweights. Being the best ever strawweight is like being the best ever Green Party candidate. We're not sure it's even a real division, even if Lopez was a hell of a champion. If only he were 140 pounds.



Lopez disposes of obscure challenger Morgan Nduma



7
MARVELOUS MARVIN HAGLER
Middleweight, 1980-1987

Length	**7**
Defenses	**12**
Challengers	**8.5**
Impact	**4.5**
Total	**32**

When Bernard Hopkins chose to latch onto Hagler as his middleweight idol, he couldn't have picked a better guy. We guess Monzon would have been a good candidate, having held the middleweight record for title defenses for so long, but Hopkins has much more in common with Hagler than he did Monzon: the East coast roots, the old-school style, the attitude, the discipline, the underappreciated skills. It goes on. Then, of course, there are the reigns.

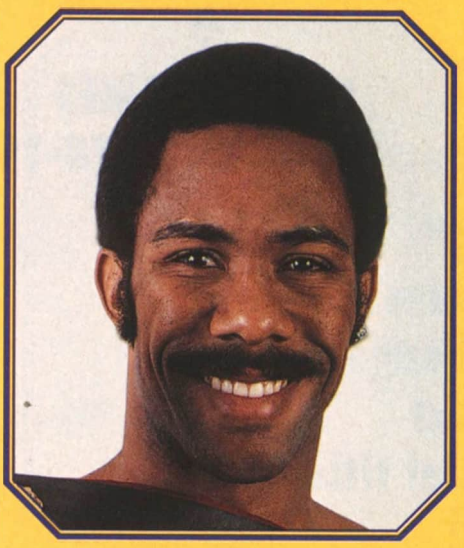
Obviously, Hagler didn't last as long as champion as Hopkins has and he didn't make as many defenses, but 12 defenses of the undisputed title over seven years is nothing to doubt. If you want to get picky, you can say it should have been a year longer, because a majority of observers thought Hagler outpointed Vito Antuofermo when the two met for the title the first time, in November 1979. But you can't do it that way. What's done is done. It goes in as a seven-year reign.

Here's where Hagler outdoes his student: He defended against Roberto Duran, Thomas Hearns, Antuofermo, Mustafa Hamsho, John Mugabi, and Juan Roldan, each of whom was better than anyone Hopkins has beaten save for Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya.

You might argue that Hearns was moving up originally from welterweight against Hagler, and that Duran was not only older, but had done his best work at lightweight, for cripe's sake. We'd argue back, of course, that both Hearns and Duran went on not only to win versions of the middleweight belt after their losses to Hagler, but also to forge striking victories along the way. Both were very good middleweights. So there. (And yes, we know Mugabi was mainly a junior middleweight, but who would argue that on the night he gave Hagler all hell that he wouldn't have beaten any other middleweight in the world?)

Hagler rips Tony Sibson en route to defense number six

Hagler scores very highly in Historical Impact, in good measure the result of two fights that marked the era: his demolition of Hearns, which stands as one of the more thrilling of the era's very important fights, and his shocking loss to the surprisingly adept Ray Leonard in the era's biggest upset. It doesn't hurt him much that he lost the latter; it was close enough to debate and his ability to walk away from the ring afterward and resist a comeback contributes to our idea and memory of him as a special champion indeed.



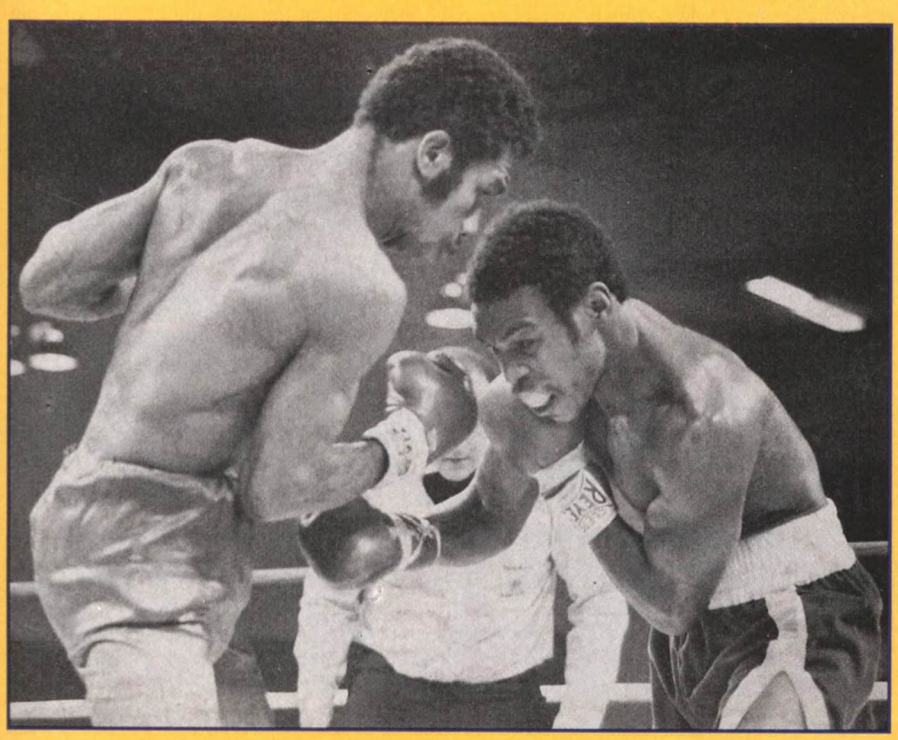
8
EUSEBIO PEDROZA
Featherweight, 1978-1985

Length	**7**
Defenses	**19**
Challengers	**6**
Impact	**2.5**
Partial title	**-3**
Total	**31.5**

It was Pedroza's great misfortune that he shared a division and an era with Danny "Little Red" Lopez and then Salvador Sanchez. Lopez was a right-hand puncher and wonderfully exciting, a born television fighter. Sanchez was a smooth, gifted boxer-puncher, more charismatic, younger, more beloved and maybe a better fighter than Pedroza. Pedroza wasn't especially exciting or charismatic; he simply got the job done time after time. His title reign was very strong and because of it, he deserves better than to be remembered as that "other" late-1970s, early-'80s featherweight champion, if he's remembered at all.

You like numbers? Consider these: Pedroza's 19 consecutive title defenses are the second most ever at featherweight (Abe Attell's 20 is the division record). His seven-year, two-month reign is also second best ever at 126. Lopez, by contrast, made eight title defenses during his two-year reign, very respectable by most standards but puny compared to Pedroza's 19. Sanchez managed nine defenses in two years before getting killed in a car crash. Would he have lasted longer than Pedroza did? Sanchez' supporters believe so, but we'll never know, and to assume so simply because he was more popular than Pedroza is hardly fair.

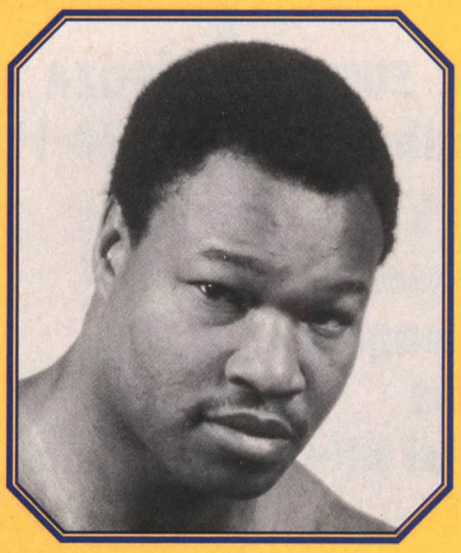
The temptation with Pedroza, because he was a WBA titleholder, and that organization is known particularly for the weakness of its mandatory challengers, is to downplay his opposition. But Pedroza defended against several good fighters: tough Rocky Lockridge (twice), who went on to become a two-time junior lightweight titlist; former WBA junior featherweight beltholder Jorge Lujan; lightning-fisted Bernard Taylor; tough perennial contender Juan LaPorte; and an admittedly aged Ruben Olivares. That's not a bad featherweight lineup.



Pedroza (left) goes head-to-head with Rocky Lockridge in 1980

Pedroza also stopped Patrick Ford, whom Sanchez decisioned, and decisioned Jose Caba, whom Lopez stopped. The bottom line: Pedroza gets a surprisingly high score for the quality of his challengers. More than you would have thought going in.

Pedroza also pulls a so-so score in Historical Impact. He would have helped himself immensely in this area had he unified the title or, absent that, had he defended against another big name, the way Sanchez did when he destroyed the wonderful junior featherweight champion Wilfredo Gomez in their superfight in '81. But you really can't blame Pedroza for that. You can blame him for not unifying, however, and he thus loses three points from his total score. Still, Pedroza did good work, something that's become clearer with the passage of time. Sure he was arrogant, not a little dirty, and lucky sometimes. But his reign belongs here.



9
LARRY HOLMES
Heavyweight, 1978-1985

Length	**7**
Defenses	**19**
Challengers	**4**
Impact	**4**
Partial title	**-3**
Total	**31**

If you asked Holmes today what his legacy might be, he'd sooner or later get around to describing it in some words or other as being history's least appreciated and most frequently underrated dominant heavyweight champion. His placement here, rather than somewhere higher in this collection, supports that assessment, and should make neither Holmes nor his supporters especially happy. He was a dominant champion. But this is where his reign belongs.

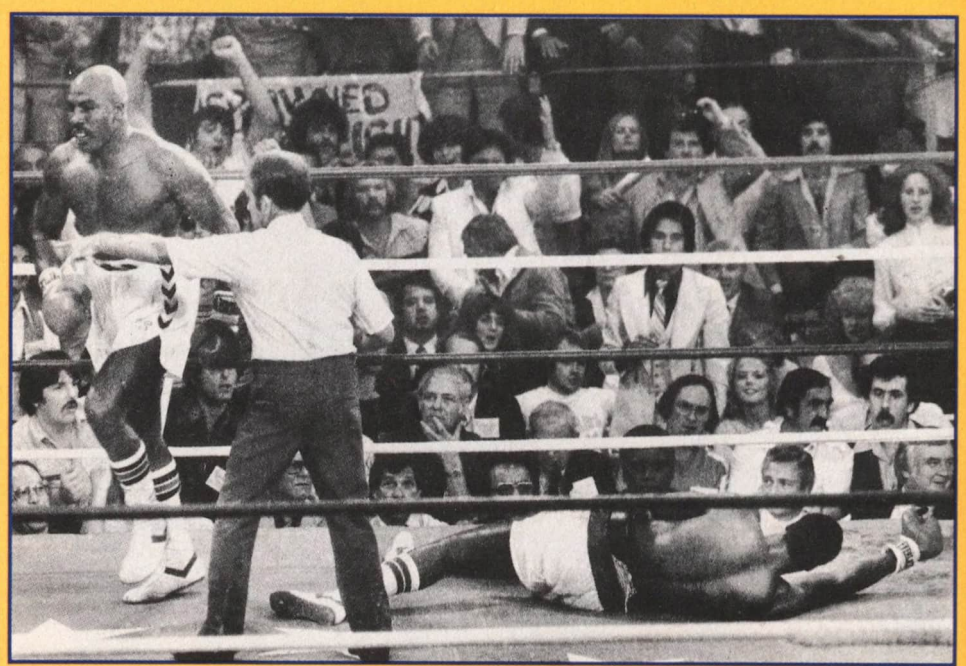
First the good news: Outside of Joe Louis, no heavyweight champion made as many consecutive defenses as did Holmes. (In the aggregate, Muhammad Ali made as many, but that was split over two reigns.) Moreover, his seven-year reign is the second longest in heavyweight history and his nearly three-defenses-per-year schedule was quite reasonable for the modern age. And he was dominant, at least early on; his first eight defenses and 11 of his first 12 ended in knockouts. Clearly his reign marks him as Hall of Fame worthy and is among modern history's 10 best.

Here's where it gets dicey: Holmes' challengers were, well, awful, with just a couple of exceptions. Alfredo Evangalista, Ossie Ocasio, Lorenzo Zanon, Scott LeDoux, Scott Frank, Trevor Berbick, Lucien Rodriguez, and David Bey make up arguably the least-talented collection of heavyweight title challengers ever. The mid-level group, consisting of Mike Weaver, Leon Spinks, Renaldo Snipes, Tim Witherspoon, Carl Williams, Bonecrusher Smith, and a 38-year-old Ali, were marginally better. The good ones? Earnie Shavers and, arguably, Gerry Cooney. That's it.

You'll hear it said that a champion shouldn't be downgraded simply because his opposition was soft; it's not his fault. No, it's not his fault. But what should we do? Reward him for it? Then what would become of those who ruled over a mostly stalwart bunch? No, Holmes takes a hit on the quality of his challengers.

It hurts Holmes too that he never unified the title. Of his 19 defenses, 16 were of the WBC title and three of the IBF, while an assortment of guys he never fought, for whatever reason—Greg Page, Pinklon Thomas, Michael Dokes, Gerrie Coetzee, Tony Tubbs—passed around the WBA trinket.

Despite a long but mostly unremarkable reign, Holmes manages a good score on Historical Impact, based almost solely on two fights: his stoppage of Ali, which was mostly a farce, but a farce watched by the entire world, and his knockout of Cooney, which was, many have forgotten, at the time the highest grossing prize fight in history.



Holmes had to come off the floor to beat Earnie Shavers in a 1979 defense

10
ARCHIE MOORE
Light Heavyweight, 1952-1961

Length	**9**
Defenses	**9**
Challengers	**7**
Impact	**5**
Total	**30**

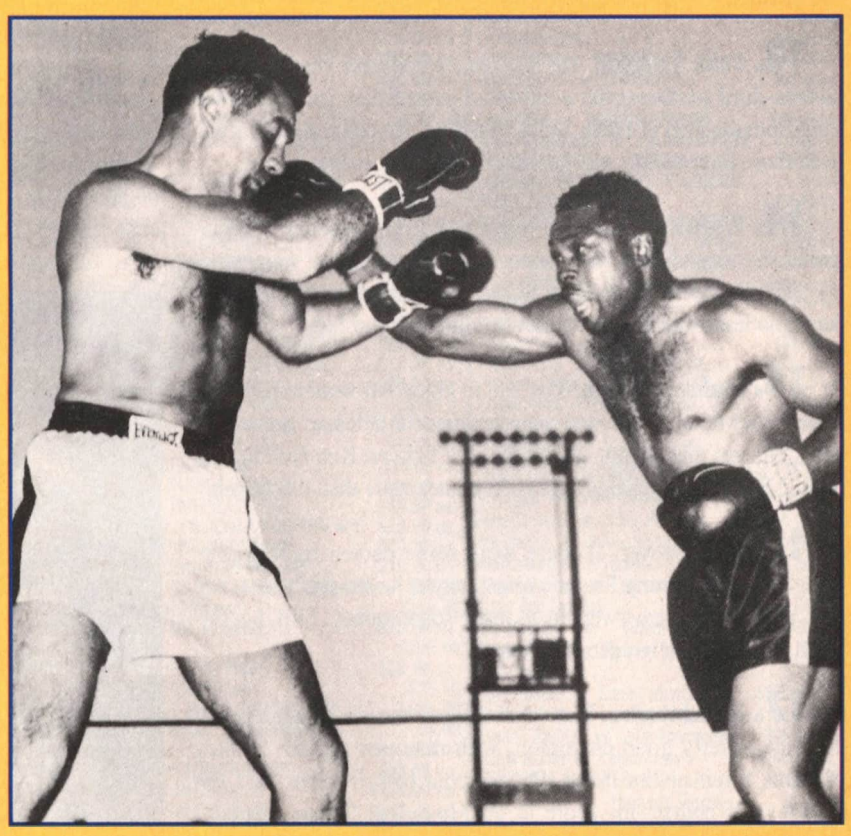
Moore's appearance here will be greeted in two distinct ways: nonchalance by those who assumed he'd be here because he was a great fighter, and surprise by those who recall that the now defunct National Boxing Association stripped him for failing to meet their top contender. Neither side is entirely wrong. But first things first.

Moore's nine-year, two-month reign is the division record. The only one who comes close is Bob Foster at six years, and when you consider that Moore was 36 years old when he won the title, you recognize the significance of the duration of his reign. You know by now the story of Moore being the top contender for seven years before he got his chance, and though he gets no points for it here—there is no "How Badly Was He Screwed" category—it does factor into the equation indirectly later on.

Moore's nine defenses clearly represent a less-than-busy work rate; one title defense per year. Here's the rub: During that nine-year span, Moore fought an astonishing 53 times. Many of those fights—against Rocky Marciano, against Floyd Patterson, against Willi Besmanoff and Howard King and others—were at heavyweight. So while it's true that in the strictest sense that Moore was not a busy champion, he was a busy fighter. It's not unreasonable to say that just about every good fighter who weighed 175 pounds or more during that era fought Moore, and the great majority lost to him, even if only nine of them were official title challengers. That has to count for something.

Questioning the quality of Moore's challengers is interesting. A full half of them were utterly forgettable: Giulio Rinaldi, Tony Anthony, Yolande Pompey, and Yvon Durelle (twice), who, despite the drama of their first encounter, was no world-beater. So why the high score? Every one of his remaining three challengers was a Hall of Famer: Joey Maxim (against whom Moore defended twice), Bobo Olson, and Harold Johnson. How many guys on this list can say that?

If you have to ask why Moore gets a high score for his impact, you haven't been paying attention. He's regarded as the best or second-best light heavyweight ever, holds the record for career knockouts, and gets an extra push here for winning the title at such an advanced age. The circumstances around the NBA stripping Moore are these: They wanted him to fight Johnson. Moore had already beaten him four times in five meetings. So he passed. They stripped him after he beat Rinaldi in 1961, and it has no bearing on his reign. He'd already done everything he had to do.



Moore defends against Joey Maxim in 1953, the man he had taken the title from the previous year

THE NEXT 10

It would be an injustice to some wonderful champions to have stopped at the top 10, so here are the next 10, arrived at using the same criteria.

11. Roberto Duran. His six-year reign of terror as the world lightweight champion was noteworthy in its consistency and hostility. Just one more high-quality challenger in addition to Esteban DeJesus, Vilomar Fernandez, and Adolfo Viruet, and he'd have cracked the top 10.

12. Khaosai Galaxy. For sheer volume, the WBA junior bantamweight titleholder was up near the top with 19 title defenses in the 1980s. What kept him out of the top 10? The quality, such as it was, of his challengers. We know; it's shocking for a WBA titlist.

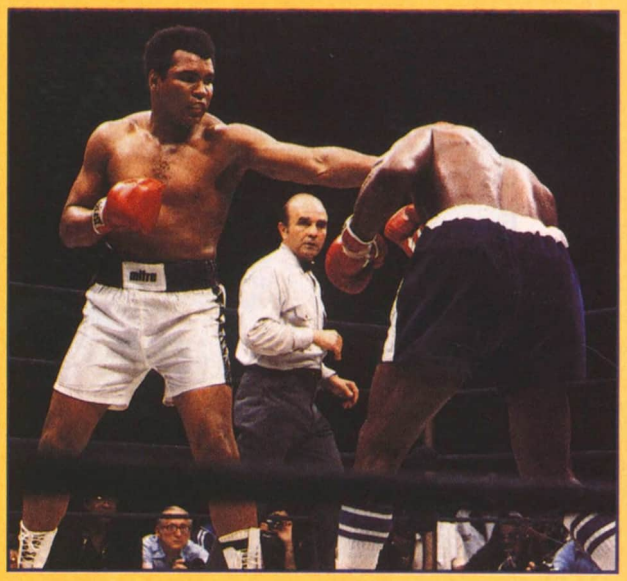
13. Felix Trinidad. His six-year, 15-defense stay at the top of one-third of the welterweight division all but guarantees his entry into the Hall of Fame. What hurt him? He never fully unified. Add those three points, and he finishes ahead of Archie Moore.

14. Wilfredo Gomez. In an era heavy with wonderful champions, the magnificent WBC super bantamweight king was one of the best. He holds the division record for defenses with 17—all by kayo, no less—but like many, never unified. It hurt him.

15. Muhammad Ali. You had to know Ali would make it in here somewhere. His second reign featured 10 defenses against the likes of—get this lineup—Ron Lyle, Joe Frazier, Ken Norton, and Earnie Shavers. No challengers got a higher score than this bunch.

16. Bob Foster. If there were some decent light heavyweights around during Foster's reign, maybe he wouldn't have had to fight all those heavyweights to make some money. Still, his six-year, 14-defense reign gets him here.

17. Jack Johnson. Lost in all the lore around Johnson is that he was a pretty good champion, with defenses against Stanley Ketchel, Fireman Jim Flynn, Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, and Jim Jeffries. Of course, his score in the Historical Impact category doesn't hurt.

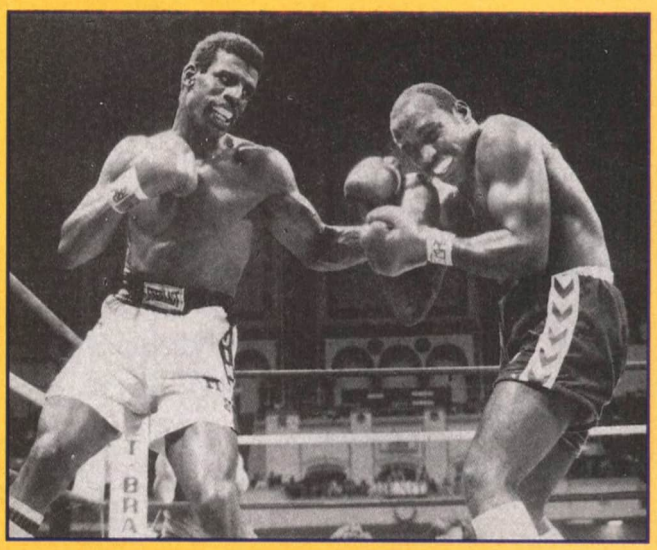


Ali jabs his way past Shavers during his second reign

18. Muhammad Ali. Ali's first reign wasn't as star-studded as his second; his best challengers were "only" Sonny Liston, Floyd Patterson, and George Chuvalo. But throw in Zora Folley, Henry Cooper, and a shot Cleveland Williams, along with nine total defenses over three years, and here he is again.

19. Benny Leonard. Leonard wasn't the most active lightweight champion ever, but his six defenses against sterling competition over a six-year reign, coupled with the highest score possible in historical impact, gets him here.

20. Michael Spinks. Given the depth of the wonderful 1980s light heavyweight division, how could Spinks, with his four-year, 10-defense reign, land this low? He beat the division's best fighters on his way up. Outside of Dwight Qawi and the Davis brothers, his challengers were ordinary. ■



Spinks unifies the light heavyweight title against Dwight Muhammad Qawi

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(Retains IBF Title)
John Ruiz W 12 Andrew Golota
(Retains WBA Title)
Hasim Rahman KO 4 Kali Meehan
Larry Donald W 12 Evander Holyfield
DaVarryl Williamson W 10 Oliver McCall
Yanqui Diaz W 10 Vaughn Bean
Clifford Etienne KO 2 Kenny Craven
Sinan Samil Sam KO 10 Dennis Bakhtov
Derrick Jefferson KO 3 Ed White
Nicolay Valuev W Disq. 4 Gerald Nobles
Matt Skelton KO 11 Keith Long
Calvin Brock KO 2 Wesley Martin
Ruslan Chagaev KO 4 Asmir Vojnovic
Gilbert Martinez D 10 Sherman Williams
Colin Wilson KO 8 Roger Izonritei
Alexander Dimitrenko W 8 Ross Puritty
Richel Hersisia KO 8 Sergey Dychkov
Patrice L'Heureux KO 9 Steve McKay
Art Binkowski D 8 Charles Hatcher
Tomasz Bonin W Disq. 7 Ken Murphy
John Poore KO 4 Willie Perryman
Devin Vargas KO 1 Adam Smith
Butterbean W 4 Brian McIntyre

CRUISERWEIGHTS

Alexander Gurov KO 2 Vincenzo Rossitto
Hugo Garay KO 6 Felix Hernandez
Giacobbe Fragomeni W 12
Frederic Serrat
Brian Magee KO 7 Neil Linford
Ehinomen Ehikhamenor KO 4 Mark Miller
Luke Munsen KO 2 Peter O'Kane
Rayco Saunders KO 8 Anthony Williams
William Guthrie KO 2 John Romans

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Mehdi Sahnoune KO 4 Carlos Ramos
Nader Hamdan W 6 Justin Clements
Andre Thysse KO 8 Erasmus Magwaza
Aaron Mitchell KO 5 Carlton Holland
Paul Murdoch W 12 John Wyborn
Allan Green KO 2 Etienne Whitaker
Lolenga Mock KO 3 Giovanni Alvarez
Will McIntyre W 8 Anthony Stephens
Will McIntyre KO 3 Thomas James

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Mikkel Kessler KO 8 Manny Siaca
(Wins WBA Title)
Mario Veit KO 9 Charles Brewer
Sam Soliman KO 4 Diego Castillo
Jose Spearman D 6 Giorbis Barthelemy
Oscar Bravo KO 1 Miguel Aquila
Kelly Pavlik W 8 Ross Thompson
Ronald Hearns KO 1 Martin Goodman

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Troy Rowland W 10 Epifanio Mendoza
Yory Boy Campas W 8 Raul Munoz
Hassine Cherifi W 8 Paul Sextius
Larry Marks KO 4 Elias Cruz
Jozsef Nagy KO 2 Kai Kauramaki
Matt Vanda W 8 Patrick Thompson
Yuri Foreman KO 2 Shakir Ashanti
Elvin Ayala KO 7 Chance Leggett
Dante Craig W 6 Daniel Neal
Carlos DeLeon Jr. W 6 James McAllister
James McGirt Jr. W 6
Daniel Stanisavljevic

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Winky Wright W 12 Shane Mosley
(Retains World Title)
Michele Piccirillo W 6 Serge Vigne
Ian Gardner W 12 Tokunbo Olajide
Alex Bunema W 12 Alberto Mercedes
Carlos Bojorquez KO 8 Dewey Welliver
Armando Velardez W 10 Rudy Lovato
Marlon Thomas W 10 Darrell Woods
Vince Phillips Tech. Win 8 Dewey Welliver
Jose Celaya KO 3 Alphonso Williams
Sergei Dzindziruk KO 11 Hussein Bayram

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Heavyweight Chris Byrd zaps Jameel McCline with a jab

William Gare W 12 Tshepo Mashego
Thomas McDonagh W 10 Darren Rhodes
Richard Williams KO 3
Szabolcs Rimovszky
Michael Jones W Disq. 3 Jamie Moore
Artur Atadzhanov W 8
Nurhan Suleymanoglu
Willie Lee KO 1 Ike Ezeji
Said Ouali W 6 Jerome Ellis
Daniel Craycraft W 4 Matt McKart

WELTERWEIGHTS

Sebastian Lujan KO 1 Cesar Leiva
Michel Trabant W 8 Alban Mothie
Michele Orlando W 12 Juho Tolppola
Marty Jakubowski KO 4 Kevin Payne
David Barnes KO 6 James Hare
Joseph Makaringe W 10 Walter Saporiti
Allan Vester KO 6 Petr Rykala
Miguel Figueroa KO 7 Julian Burford
Mauro Lucero KO 1 Eduardo Gomez
Bolillo Gonzalez W 10 Saul Duran
Andre Eason W 8 William Rojas
Ray Sanchez W 10 Troy Wilson
Matthew Hatton W 10 Robert Burton
Shamone Alvarez KO 1
Mohammed Kayongo
Dimitriy Salita W 8 Paul Delgado
Joel Julio KO 3 Antonio Soriano

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

Kostya Tszyu KO 3 Sharmba Mitchell
(Retains World Title)
Junior Witter KO 2 Krzysztof Bienias
Carlos Wilfredo Vilches W 12 Walter Diaz
Norberto Bravo W 10 Jesus Santiago
Raymond Narh KO 6 Rogelio Barron
Marco Perez W 8 Ubaldo Hernandez
Herman Ngoudjo KO 2 Ambioris Figuero
Willy Blain W 4 Francisco Gomez
Mia St. John W 4 Lana Alexander

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Aldo Rios KO 3 Jason Cook
Eleazar Contreras W 12 Goyo Vargas
Matt Zegan KO 6 Claudio Martinet
Gilberto Serrano W 10 Luis Cardozo
Almazbek Raimkulov KO 5 Lamar Murphy
Kevin Bennett W 12 Dean Phillips
Michael Katsidis KO 9 Sergio Liendo
Takehiro Shimada W 10
Kengo Nagashima
Raymond Narh KO 1 Jadschi Green
Bobby Pacquiao W 8 Oscar Villa
Hiroaki Yokota W 6 Chatisuk Twins-Gym
Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. KO 5
Sheldon Mosley

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

Marco Antonio Barrera W 12 Erik Morales
(Wins WBC Title)
Joan Guzman W 10 Joe Morales

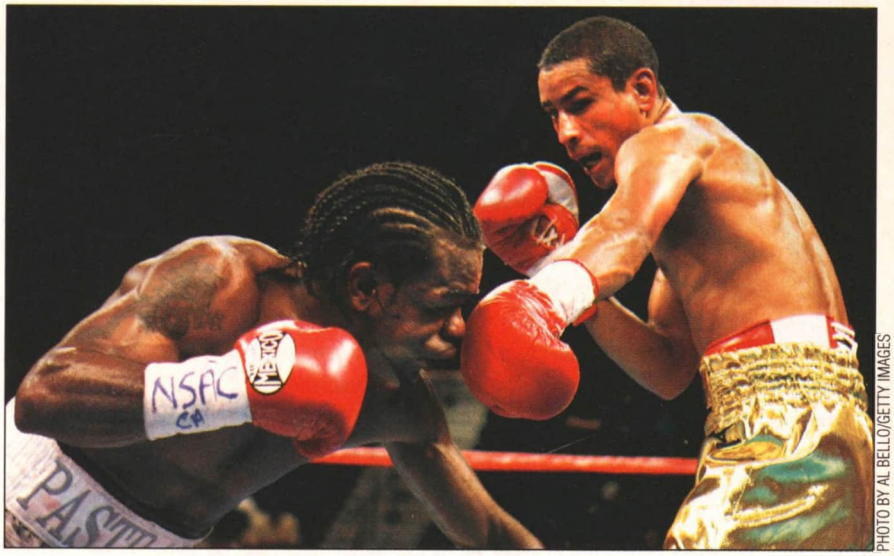

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Mauricio Pastrana eats a straight left from bantam titlist Rafael Marquez

Cassius Baloyi W 12 Lehlo Ledwaba
Julio Pablo Chacon KO 9
Ricardo Chamorro
Jose Reyes KO 9 Ivan Alvarez
Idelfonso Martinez W 10 Erik Rodriguez
Zaiki Takemoto KO 2
Samutnoi Sithnaruepol
Manuel Leyva KO 6 Luis Mendoza

FEATHERWEIGHTS

William Abelyan KO 4 Martin Honorio
Frankie Archuleta W 12 Jesus Perez
Spend Abazi W 12 Evgeny Strausov
Fahprakorb Rakkiatgym KO 2
Ronaldi Kapughu
Diego Morales KO 6 Alvaro Muro
Dazzo Williams W 12 John Simpson
Takalani Ndlovu KO 4 Willie Mabasa
Terdsak Jandaeng KO 4 Alex Escaner
Phillip Payne KO 5 Roberto Tamayo
Gamaliel Diaz KO 3 Alfredo Guarneros
Jason Adams KO 2 Sheldon Wile
Jason Litzau KO 3 Armando Cordoba

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

Oscar Larios W 12 Nedal Hussein
(Retains WBC Title)
Mahyar Monshipour KO 6
Yoddamrong Sithyodthong
(Retains WBA Title)
Daniel Ponce DeLeon KO 4
Julio Gamboa
Napapol Kiatisakchokchai KO 5
Silvestar Kimbe
Manabu Fukushima W 10 Rey Llagas
Jairo Tagliaferro KO 3 Ramiro Lara
Turcay Kaya W 10 Karim Ketoun
Adam Carrera W 10 Trinidad Mendoza

BANTAMWEIGHTS

Rafael Marquez KO 8 Mauricio Pastrana
(Retains IBF Title)
Veerapol Sahaprom KO 2 Oscar Manyuka
(Non-Title Bout)
Ratanachai Vorapin W 6 Joel Bauya
Silence Mabuza W 12 Eric Barcelona
Jhonny Gonzalez KO 2 Gabriel Elizondo
Roger Gonzalez W 8 Oscar Andrade
Mauricio Martinez Tech. Win 5
Gerardo Espinoza
Hawk Makepula KO 10 Sergio Santillan
Cesar Morales W 12 Clarence Vinson
Khulile Makeba KO 10 Cedric Conway
Kamel Guerfi W Disq. 6 Carmelo Ballone
Damian Marchiano W 12 Nestor Paniagua
Nonito Donaire W 8 Gilberto Bolanos

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

Luis Maldonado KO 6 Freddy Valdez
Gerry Penalosa KO 7
Bangsaen Sithpraprom
Will Grigsby KO 1 Ruben Poma
Edison Torres W 10 Jose Sanjuanelo
Seiji Tanaka W 10 Masayuki Arinaga

FLYWEIGHTS

Pongsaklek Wonjongkam W 8 Mark Sales
(Non-Title Bout)
Brahim Asloum W 12 Noel Arambulet
Denkaosaen Kaowichit W 12
Edmund Velayo

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS

Jose Aguirre W 10 Kermin Guardia
Wandee Singwangcha D 12 Jun Arlos
Bert Batawang KO 7 Sithembele Kibiti
Lorenzo Trejo KO 4 Vicente Hernandez
Juanito Rubillar KO 1
Samransak Singmanassak
Jose Figueroa W 8 Leonardo Castillo

STRAWWEIGHTS

Ivan Calderon W 12 Carlos Fajardo
Makoto Suzuki W 10 Elmer Gejon

BOXING EQUIPMENT
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The RING

FIGHTER *of the* MONTH

Junior welterweight champion Kostya Tszyu had a lot going against him when he entered the ring to defend the title for the first time in 22 months. So much, in fact, a lot of fans and media members predicted the end of his reign.

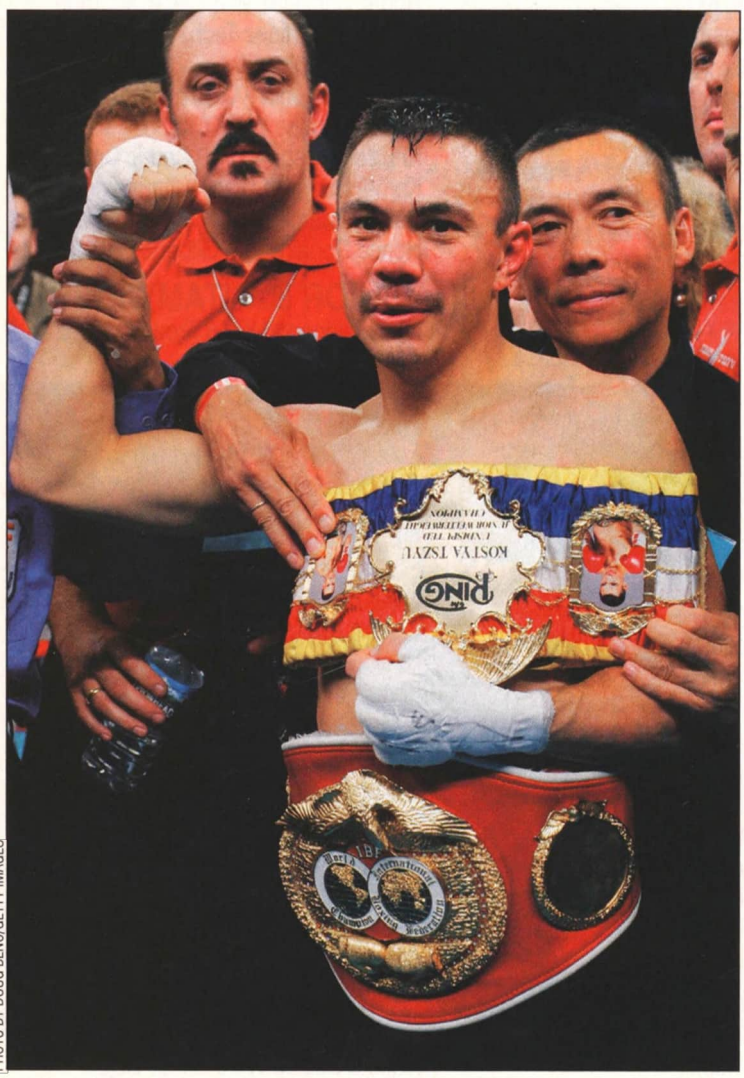

PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

First there was his challenger, the number-one rated Sharmba Mitchell, who had given Tszyu a difficult time back in February 2001 before Mitchell's bum knee forced him to quit at the end of the seventh round. Then there were the back-to-back training injuries and resulting surgeries that had kept the champ on the sidelines for so long. On top of all that, there was a new injury (bruised ribs) to contend with, which the Tszyu Crew kept secret until after the fight.

But once the much-anticipated rematch began, Tszyu put all his problems aside and devastated Mitchell with four knockdowns en route to a third-round knockout victory. It was arguably the finest performance of Tszyu's distinguished career, one that reestablished his status as the best 140-pounder in the world, set the stage for bigger paydays, and earned him Fighter of the Month honors.

• • • •

Kostya Tszyu

RINGSIDE REPORTS

Mahyar Monshipour KO 6 Yoddamrong Sithyodthong

Paris, France: After the devastating earthquake that hit the Iranian city of Bam in 2003 and left 26,000 people dead, Monshipour, 121¼, Poitiers, France via Tehran, Iran, resolved to help in his own small way. He is involved in the construction of a school in the city and is quickly becoming a role model for young Iranians as well as an emerging star in his adoptive country.

His third defense of the WBA super bantamweight title, a sixth-round stoppage of former titlist Sithyodthong, 121¾, Uthaithanee, Thailand, enhanced his reputation as one of the more exciting practitioners in the sport. More than 14,000 people were crammed into the Palais Omnisports, and Monshipour thrilled with his relentless attack from the opening bell.

Sithyodthong, 40-2-1 (18), was no slouch, having won the same belt in February'02 against Yober Ortega of Venezuela, whom he outpointed in scorching 100-degree heat in his native Thailand. In his first defense, Sithyodthong was stopped by Japan's Osamu Sato in the eighth round, who then lost the title to Monshipour. But against the hard-punching Iranian, he was overwhelmed throughout the entire six rounds, lacking the power to counteract Monshipour's aggressive tactics. Sithyodthong did have some success, catching Monshipour on the chin with some hard hooks from both hands, but never with the frequency or velocity to unduly trouble him.

"Little Tyson" is how former middleweight contender Jean-Claude Bouttier describes Monshipour, and near the end of the opening round he was getting through with enough hooks and uppercuts to suggest an "Iron" Mike one-rounder could be on the cards. Sithyodthong survived and even hit back strongly, but by electing to fight fire with fire he was playing into Monshipour's merciless hands. By the third round, the challenger's right eye was closing and he began to look a little sorry for himself. No matter how hard he tried, he could not keep Monshipour off him.

In the fifth, Sithyodthong's impending fate was sealed. Monshipour, 26-2-2 (17), ripped through his challenger's defense with a series of left hooks and overhand rights. Sithyodthong's resistance was fading. Then a wicked left hook to the liver put Sithyodthong down in the sixth. Panamanian referee Guillermo Perez issued the mandatory eight-count and Monshipour waded in with both hands banging. Sithyodthong had stood up to a lot already, and referee Perez deemed that he had endured enough and waved it over at 1:07 of the sixth.

"It is with fights like this that boxing in France will be reinvigorated," said Monshipour. "I was hit in the ribs only twice, that was all. Without doubt that was my best performance tactically, and now I hope my promoter will search for the top performers in the world."

Promoter: AB Stars Production

(11-8-04)

Brian Doogan

Juan Diaz W 12 Julien Lorcy

San Antonio, Texas: Diaz successfully defended the WBA lightweight belt for the first time, outpointing two-time former titleholder Lorcy of France in front of 2,618 fans at the SBC Center. Diaz, 21, applied his signature relentless pressure and high-volume punching to overwhelm his opponent. A well-rounded boxer-puncher, Lorcy arrived in Texas with a pretty potent pair of six-shooters, only to discover he was in a duel with a gunslinger armed with a fully loaded weapon.

Diaz aggressively took the fight to Lorcy, 32, from the opening bell and rarely let up until the final gong. Using his jab as a range finder, Diaz, 135, worked his way inside and pummeled the head and body with an assortment of hooks and crosses. Lorcy, 133½, jabbed, moved, and countered, but his punches lacked sufficient pop to discourage Diaz from pressing forward and cutting off the ring. The Frenchman covered himself well, but he could not block everything, and absorbed some murderous bodyshots. By the third round, Lorcy's right eye began to swell.

The pale, frail-looking Lorcy showed guts, standing up to Diaz' blitzkrieg and battling back tenaciously until the very end, despite taking a battering.

"He was one of the toughest guys," Diaz, 26-0 (12), said. "He took all my punches. When you get to the championship status, these guys are not going to fall. They want to take my belt."

Lorcy began punching with more conviction in the seventh, hoping perhaps that Diaz had punched himself out after six torrid rounds. He stood his ground and traded with the younger man, landing some solid hooks and uppercuts, but Diaz, who was far from spent, relished the toe-to-toe action and got the better of the exchanges. Diaz continued to get the best of the

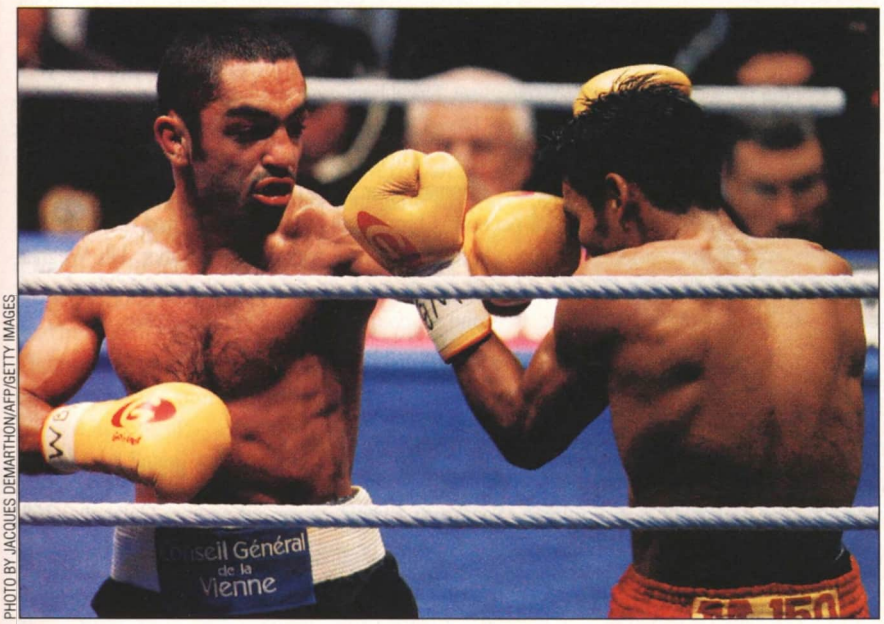

PHOTO BY JACQUES DEMARTHON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Monshipour connects with a left against Sithyodthong

action in rounds eight to 10, and staggered Lorcy on several occasions with multi-punch flurries, but the Frenchman's experience and sturdy chin allowed him to survive.

Eager for a knockout, Diaz began loading up on his punches in the 11th, allowing Lorcy to momentarily seize control. Working his jab overtime, Lorcy repeatedly stung Diaz. But just when it seemed Lorcy had comfortably won the round, Diaz broke through and ended the round hammering away with both fists.

Despite piling up a huge lead, Diaz attacked with a vengeance in the final round, still hoping for a late stoppage. Aware that a knockout was his only route to victory at that point, Lorcy too went for broke and let his gloves fly. The result was a thrilling slugfest for which Diaz was better equipped. Diaz punctuated his victory by unleashing a punishing volley of punches with Lorcy pinned against the ropes at the final bell.

Rafael Ramos (USA) refereed. Judges Glen Feldman (USA) and Ray Hawkins (USA) scored the fight 118-110, while Hubert Earle (Canada) had it 119-109, all for Diaz. The scores, though accurate, failed to reflect how hard Lorcy, 56-4-2 (40), made Diaz work to win each round. THE RING scored it 120-110 for Diaz. Lorcy's three previous losses were all via split or majority decisions.

After wresting the belt from Lakva Sim in his hometown of Houston in July, Diaz said his immediate goal was to unify the lightweight title. His rhetoric was somewhat toned down following his first defense.

"I'm going to start unifying, but slowly," he said.

Television: ESPN2

Promoter: Main Events

(11-4-04)

Peter Lim

PHOTO BY MIGUEL VILLAGRAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Harris shook off this left to stop Urkal in the 11th round

Vivian Harris KO 11 Oktay Urkal

Berlin, Germany: Any doubts that prevailed after their first encounter were emphatically removed as Harris, 139, Brooklyn, New York, demonstrated both his boxing prowess and his potency as a puncher against the ever-tough and durable Urkal, 139¾, Berlin, Germany, via Turkey, before approximately 3,000 people in the Tempodrom Arena. Harris amassed a comfortable points lead before stopping Urkal in the 11th round with a short, powerful right hook to the jaw to retain the WBA super lightweight title—Harris' first defense since becoming the sole WBA titlist following the organization's indefensible stripping of real champion Kostya Tszyu. The kayo of Urkal was a strong statement in a strong division. Harris is a serious contender to become the foremost 140-pounder in the world.

The 26-year-old made excellent use of his physical advantages. At 5'9½", he is tall for his weight and his 74-inch reach reinforces the damage he can do with his strong jab and powerful right cross. His manager and trainer, Emanuel Steward, is adamant that he has the tools to dominate the division, and while comparisons with Tommy Hearns, Steward's most celebrated fighter, may be hard to justify yet, Harris, 25-1-1 (17), may someday be capable of carrying a similar kind of threat.

He outboxed Urkal, 34-3 (10), over the first couple of rounds, utilizing his jab and his speed, but Urkal came back strongly in the third, his own boxing skills far from negligible, as a fighting performance against Kostya Tszyu a couple of years before would suggest. But at 34, Urkal's best days are behind him. He was unable to sustain the pace and drive that made him so competitive when they clashed earlier in the year. Harris, an improved fighter under Steward's tutelage, was draining Urkal with the quality of his punching and marking him up with a cut by the right eye and damage to his nose.

Even when Urkal penetrated Harris' guard, as he did in the sixth with a strong right hand, the New Yorker, originally from Guyana, showed no ill effects. This was disheartening for Urkal, who betrayed signs of tiredness while the damage to his nose seemed also to be discomfiting. A right cross caused his knees to dip, and he later slipped to the canvas, but he managed to come through testing moments in the seventh, eighth, and ninth rounds. But by the 11th, Harris sensed he could engineer a conclusive finale.

They were in close, Urkal bent over and hurt from an accumulation of short, powerful blows, when Harris measured a final devastating right to the jaw that pitched Urkal on the floor. He rose before American referee Armando Garcia had counted to eight, but stumbled as the official beckoned him to walk toward him, and the fight was stopped 56 seconds into the round with Urkal's trainer, Uli Wegner, standing on the ring apron ready to throw in the towel. Harris was ahead by one, two, and six points on the judges' scorecards.

Promoter: Wilfried Sauerland

(10-23-04)

Brian Doogan

Joe Calzaghe W 12 Kabary Salem

Edinburgh, Scotland: Events conspired against Calzaghe, 168, Newbridge, Wales, all year. The world's leading super middleweight found it torturous to make the 168-pound limit in February before stopping Mger Mkrtchian of Armenia. It was to be his last bout at 168. But a back injury forced a postponement and then a cancellation

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Rusty Calzaghe had to climb off the deck to decision Salem

of his challenge of Glen Johnson for the IBF light heavyweight title. His marriage to his teenage sweetheart broke up. Johnson landed a fight with Roy Jones—and knocked Jones out. So it was symbolic of his recent fortunes that Calzaghe should find himself floored heavily by a right hand by Salem, 167, Brooklyn, New York, via Egypt, in the fourth round in front of around 3,000 fans at the Royal Highland Centre. Calzaghe rose to win, but the fight, like his year, was one best forgotten.

It was untidy from the outset, Salem's propensity to use his head resulting in ugly exchanges, Calzaghe's rustiness another factor. "It wasn't Joe Calzaghe in there. Salem came to spoil and he succeeded in making me look bad," Calzaghe said. "But even the best can have a bad day." It threatened to be one of his worst when that right hand landed midway through the fourth round.

The fight was barely into its second minute when referee Paul Thomas (England) had to admonish Salem for low blows. They also cracked heads hard before the round was over. Calzaghe began to find the range with his southpaw jab and connected with several left leads in the second. He also fired a furious battery of blows before the end of the round as Salem was trapped along the ropes. Further fouling with his head forced referee Thomas to deduct a point from Salem's total in the third. It wasn't pretty, but Calzaghe, 38-0 (30), seemed in control.

He hurt Salem with a right hook in the fourth, but as he moved in to take advantage, he was carrying his hands dangerously low. Backed into a corner, Salem saw the opening and unleashed a solid counter right that landed flush on Calzaghe's chin as his momentum was pushing him forward. The impact was heavy. Calzaghe fell on the seat of his pants. It was the second knockdown of his career (Byron Mitchell floored him in 2003). "I was off-balance and embarrassed," he insisted after the fight. But he was hurt. He rose at the count of four, and for the remainder of the round and the whole of the fifth, he surrendered the initiative to Salem, 23-4 (12) with 1 no-contest. Calzaghe was more tentative than he has ever been inside the ring.

But the Egyptian was unable to exploit the 32-year-old Calzaghe's weakness. The Welshman's head cleared and gradually he regained his composure. His strategy from this point changed to keeping the fight at long range, and it worked, as Salem slowed and his foremost concern became survival. Calzaghe cruised to the final bell, though his frustration came through in the 11th when he had a point deducted for butting. In the final round, Calzaghe reverted to more legitimate practices and finally put Salem down with a hard left. The judges voted for him unanimously: Renato Caddeo (Italy) 117-109, Frank Cairo (USA) 118-107, and Manuel Oliver (USA) 116-109. THE RING scored it 117-109 for Calzaghe.

"I'm still looking to move up and land a big fight at light heavyweight in 2005," said Calzaghe. It is what his career now needs.

Promoter: Sports Network

(10-22-04)

Brian Doogan

Yutaka Niida W 12 Juan Landaeta

Tokyo, Japan: WBA 105-pound titlist Niida, 104¾, Japan, made the first defense of his second reign as he turned aggressive in the later rounds to pull out a split decision over 12 close rounds against "interim" titlist Landaeta, 104¾. Judges Pinit Prayadsab (Thailand) and Lahcen Oumghar (Netherlands) both had it for Niida, by scores of 115-113 and 115-114, respectively, while Levi Martinez (USA) saw it 115-113 for Landaeta. The referee was Rafael Ramos (USA).

PHOTO BY TOSHIFUMI KITAMURA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Venezuelan Landaeta drills bloody Niida, but drops split decision in Japan

Niida, 26, got off to a good start when he landed a solid straight right against the much taller Venezuelan southpaw in the opening session. Landaeta, also 26, took the second, as he connected with a good left hand and kept the pressure on with constant jabs. Niida, who had dethroned Noel Arambulet by a unanimous decision less than four months earlier, was in command with busy combinations in the third. The lanky Venezuelan, however, controlled the fourth through sixth as he kept going forward with incessant, if not effective, jabs. The Japanese titlist sustained a cut caused by a butt midway through the sixth, and it became worse in later rounds.

The tide seemingly turned in the seventh, when Niida let loose with a flurry of punches to the bewildered Venezuelan. Landaeta, as expected based on some of his past performances, began fading in the second half, while Niida, 17-1-3 (8), clearly dominated the ninth and 11th with fusillades of punches to Landaeta's face. Though the Venezuelan may have captured the final session, Niida's superior powerpunching carried him through on the cards of two of the judges. Landaeta, 16-3-1 (14), seldom threw powerful punches in later rounds, preferring to pace himself with pawing jabs, and it cost him.

Promoter: Akihiko Honda's Teiken Promotions

(10-30-04)

Joe Koizumi

Joan Guzman W 10 Joe Morales

Glendale, Arizona: For Guzman, it was supposed to be a time to shine. He was returning to the site of his pro debut, and in the seven years since then he'd positioned himself to make a move into another income level.

The 28-year-old Guzman is nicknamed "Little Tyson," and sure enough, there was namesake "Iron" Mike in a crowd of more than 8,000 on hand for the main event between Kostya Tszyu and Sharmba Mitchell.

Only one problem: Guzman forgot to make weight for what was scheduled as a defense of a minor 122-pound belt against Mexico's Marcos Licona, who withdrew after a disputed weigh-in. Guzman showed up at 128, and said he was unaware it was a title bout. Enter Morales, 129, who flew in from San Antonio, Texas, on less than a half-day's notice.

Maybe Guzman thought it was still 2003, when his only bouts were a pair of over-the-weight appearances that ended in first round knockouts. Any effect on Guzman's purse was unavailable at press time, but his management can't be too happy. As a result of failing to a make weight and the substitute opponent, the contest was bumped from opening the Showtime broadcast.

One final wrinkle: Morales could have folded, but hung around to give Guzman some hell.

Guzman, a 1996 Dominican Republic Olympian, has been gaining notice with his long-armed destructive power. Against Morales, he faded down the stretch and would have been in trouble against a better-prepared foe.

In the first round, it looked like Guzman would live up to the hype. His blazing bodyshots made ringsiders wince, but Morales soaked them up and countered with a confident look. But even though Guzman continued to thump home huge whaps as the crowd howled, Morales weathered the assault.

By the middle rounds, however, Morales realized he could hold his own. Guzman continued to snarl, but Morales was not intimidated, and returned to his corner smiling.

Guzman, 22-0 (17), was on the receiving end during round seven when Morales, 18-7 (8), pressed the action and hurt the favorite. Guzman never had any serious problems outside of that, but Morales kept it closer than it should have been, and definitely won the fans over.

Judges Gerald Maltz (97-93), Chris Wilson (98-92), and Raul Caiz Jr. (99-91) all scored it for Guzman, but there were more than a few boos when the decision was announced. THE RING scored it 98-94 for Guzman, who said he would probably not fight at junior featherweight again.

The referee was Bobby Ferrara.

Promoter: Millennium Events, Scott Maling

(11-6-04)

Phil Woolever

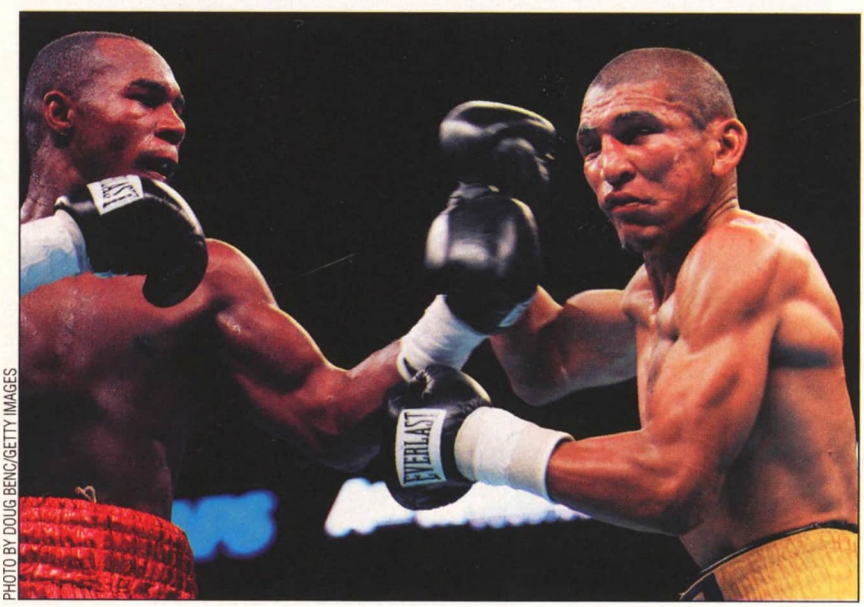

PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Guzman clocks late-substitute Morales with a left

Scott Harrison KO 1 Samuel Kebede

Glasgow, Scotland: At The British Boxing Board's annual awards, Harrison, 126, Cambuslang, Scotland, was honored as Fighter of the Year, but several weeks later he was involved in this, perhaps the Farce of the Year. It was not his fault that Kebede, 126, Malmo, Sweden, via Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, does not belong in the same town, let alone the same ring, as one of the most formidable featherweights in the world. But the British Board was not alone in asking questions after Kebede's annihilation inside a minute at the Braehead Arena.

The fact that Kebede, 24-1 (14), looked ominously small when standing next to the 27-year-old Harrison was not alarming in itself. Harrison is freakishly built for a man who can get down to 126 pounds, his physiology being more comparable to the average junior welterweight's. But it was clear enough, despite his unbeaten record, that Kebede did not have the tools to be a serious

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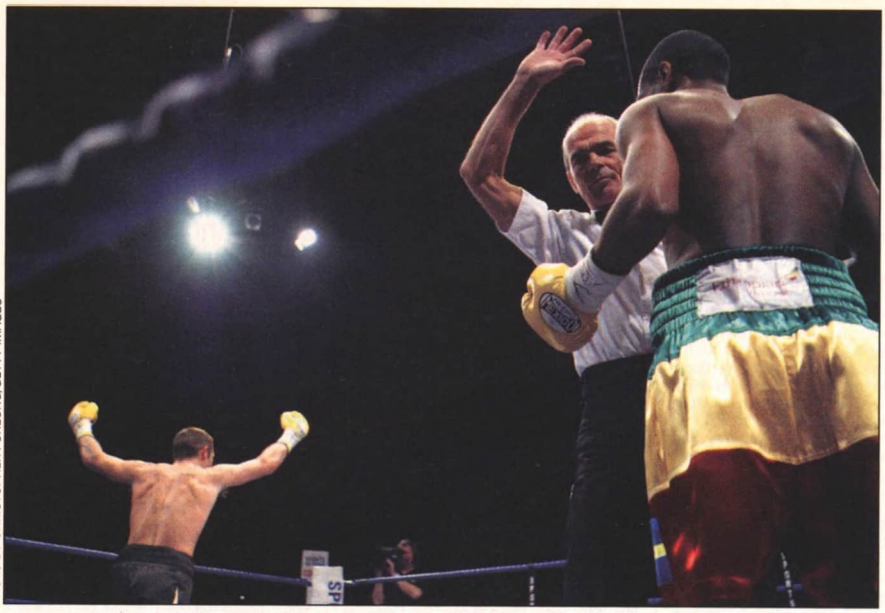

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

Ref Mickey Vann rescues overmatched Kebede as Harrison celebrates

match for the Scot. He had never gone 12 rounds and had been 10 only once. The caliber of his opposition had been mostly mediocre at best, some much worse.

Kebede stopped Hungary's Bela Sandor in four rounds last year, but Sandor had not won any of his previous 18 fights. On his European debut in 2002, having won his first 16 in South Africa, Kebede stopped Vlado Varhegyi of Slovakia in 44 seconds, but rising British prospect Kevin Mitchell subsequently stopped the Slovakian, and no one has suggested putting Mitchell in with Harrison.

But Harrison's father and trainer, Peter, insisted: "We took this guy really serious. We didn't think it was going to end in just one round. I still think Kebede is a good fighter. He was just unfortunate to fight such a world-class fighter as Scott."

His misfortune began as soon as the bell rang. Kebede was caught on the top of his head by a right and a left in the opening 10 seconds and fell face-first onto the canvas. He rose immediately, but was clearly groggy as referee Mickey Vann tolled the eight-count. Kebede's legs were shaking as he tried to remain elusive, but Harrison kept up his two-fisted assault and another right knocked Kebede to the floor again. The fear in his glazed eyes sent a shuddering signal to referee Vann, who wisely decided to halt proceedings after 59 seconds. The partisan crowd of just over 2,000 roundly booed.

"We offered this fight to two outstanding featherweights in Britain in Michael Brodie and Nicky Cook, but they both ran a mile," said Harrison's manager, Frank Maloney. Which is as close as Kebede should have been allowed to get. Maloney also spoke about a future fight with Injin Chi, the WBC titleholder, but the word from Korea is that no substantive talks have been held. It is clear, however, that Harrison, 23-2-1 (13), requires far more demanding nights than this if he is to become recognized as the finest featherweight in the world.

(10-29-04)

Brian Doogan

Mario Veit KO 9 Charles Brewer

Riesa, Germany: Looks can be deceiving. During the prefight introductions, Brewer, 166½, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, fixed a frightening stare on Veit, 167, Cottbus, Germany, and appeared ready to inflict serious damage on the local favorite. But the abuse came all Brewer's way as "The Hatchet" was hammered to the floor in the second and ninth rounds and beaten in almost every round before being stopped at the Erdgas Arena. Veit was making his first defense of something known as the WBO interim super middleweight title.

The fact that the WBO beltholder is Joe Calzaghe ought to put Veit in his proper place and this result into perspective. The Welshman blasted out the 6'3½" German in a single round in 2001. Calzaghe's intended move to light heavyweight persuaded the WBO to recognize Veit as a titleholder when he beat Kabary Salem in May, but Calzaghe's subsequent rethink downgraded Veit's status.

"I have the feeling that Joe is the crucial problem of my entire professional career," said Veit, 43-1 (23), whose only defeat has come against Calzaghe.

Brewer was no problem by comparison. The 35-year-old veteran became IBF titleholder in 1997 when he defeated Gary Ballard before he suffered the first of two controversial decision losses against Sven Ottke a year later. Brewer was also beaten by Calzaghe in 2002, but despite three wins in succession, including an incredible stoppage of Scott Pemberton, the American has declined markedly, and Veit emphasized this harsh truth from the opening round.

Veit's jab stung Brewer from the outset. The Philly fighter struggled to find his feet and when a right uppercut put him down in the second round, he knew he would be in for a long, punishing night. Brewer struck the canvas with his fist as American referee Mark Nelson completed the mandatory eight-count, but was unable to strike Veit with anything near the kind of authority that might have enabled him to get back in the fight. Instead, he was being rocked by Veit's long jabs, and the German was in total control.

In the fourth, Brewer, 40-10 (28), threatened for the only time, getting through with some solid bodyshots and also inflicting a small cut above Veit's left eye. But it was a brief highlight. Another hard right hurt him in the fifth and continued to pick mercilessly through Brewer's defenses. Referee Nelson came to Brewer's corner before the start of the seventh to make sure that he was fit to continue.

A clash of heads caused the cut over Veit's eye to worsen, but the German remained cool and efficient and staggered Brewer again with right hands toward the end of round eight. The end was near and it came courtesy of another strong right hand that knocked Brewer over. Nelson did not bother to take up a count, waving the bout over at 0:36 of the ninth.

Veit might yearn for revenge against Calzaghe, but privately he must surely harbor fears, too, and the Welshman has no real enthusiasm for facing a man he has already beaten inside a round. But the big German will be dangerous against almost everyone else in the division. Old warrior Brewer, on the other hand, should call time on his very respectable career.

Promoter: Klaus Petr Kohl

(11-6-04)

Brian Doogan ■

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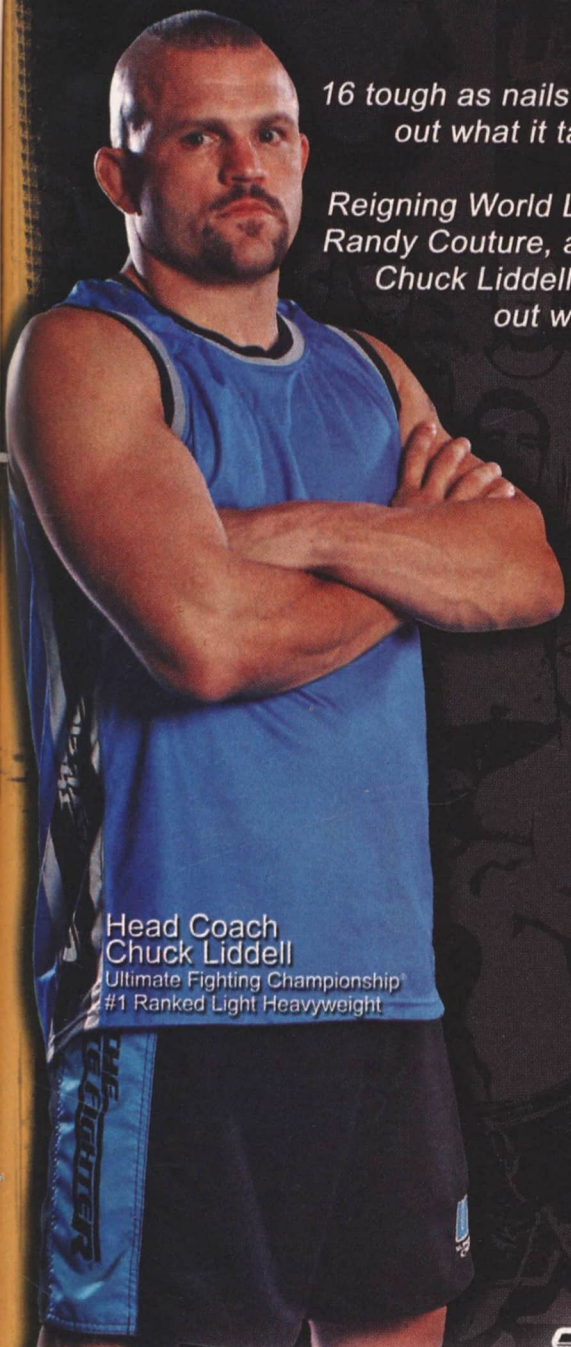

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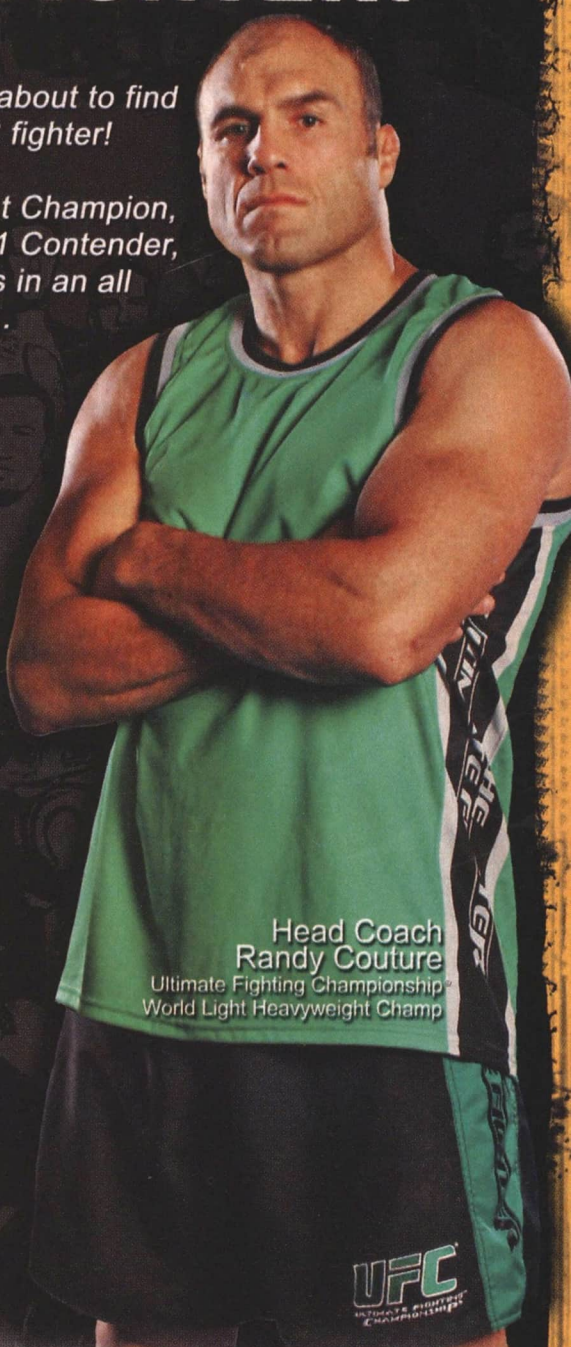

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From THE RING, May 1938

ESCOBAR REGAINS TITLE

Exciting Scenes Mark Championship Fight In Puerto Rico

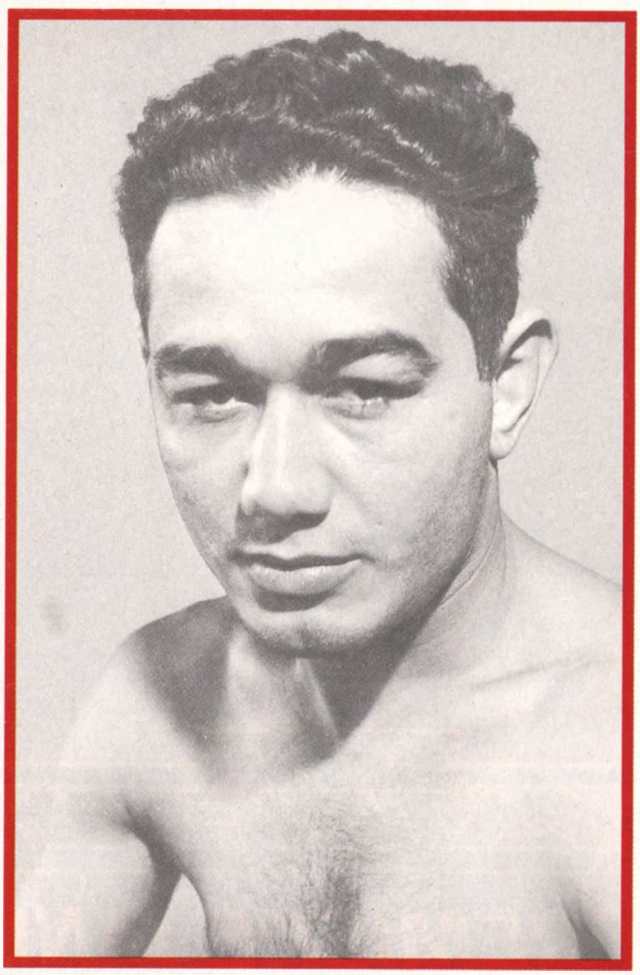
By Nat Fleischer

(Editor's Note: This is a condensed version.)

In a thrilling battle, amidst scenes unprecedented around a ringside, Sixto Escobar regained the world bantamweight championship from Harry Jeffra at the Escambron Beach Baseball Park of San Juan on February 20, and through the victory, he gained a place in boxing's Hall of Fame as one of the few fighters in the history of pugilism to regain a crown from the man who previously had taken it from him.

The record books show that never, except in the cases of Jack Britton and Ted Kid Lewis, and Pete Herman and Joe Lynch, has a pugilist regained his title from the same rival, hence the feat of Escobar winning back the world crown from Jeffra places him in the same class. Escobar previously had lost and won the American bantamweight championship from Lou Salica and then repeated in world title bouts with Jeffra.

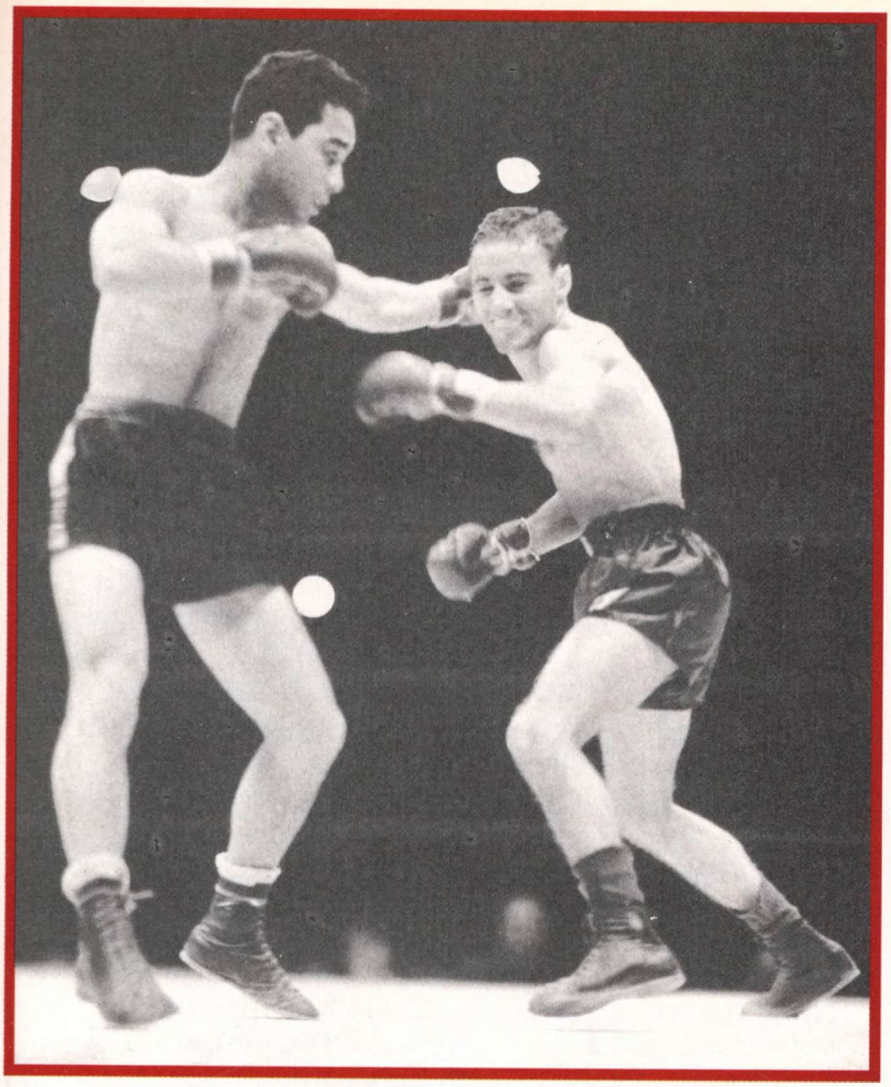
The feat of Escobar at San Juan was greater than those mentioned above, because in his case, he wasn't conceded a chance by any of the experts, yet came through with as brilliant a triumph as ever has been recorded in the division. It was a battle of courage to the highest degree displayed by both, a fight in which terrific hitting and splendid scientific boxing by Escobar held the reins.



Sixto Escobar became only the third fighter in boxing history to regain a world title against the same man to whom he'd lost it. The Puerto Rican bantamweight wasn't given much of a chance of gaining revenge on Harry Jeffra, yet that's exactly what he did.

Escobar won solely on his merits as a fighter. He gave an exhibition that ranks him with the leaders of the bantam class over a stretch of the last quarter century. Those who witnessed the bout between Jeffra and Escobar at the Polo Grounds last September, in which Jeffra gave a masterful boxing exhibition to win the world crown and were fortunate to see Escobar also in action in Puerto Rico couldn't believe their eyes. It was a rejuvenated Escobar who was out to fight to the last ditch to bring back to his native land the title he had lost in the States, and he made good.

It was a battle that can be described only in superlatives, even though it was rather one-sided after the midway point had passed. On the one hand, there was little Escobar, the cheers of his people



In their previous meeting, Jeffra, despite taking a left hand here, won the bantamweight title from Escobar. The fight took place on September 23, 1937, before 40,000 fans at the Polo Grounds in New York, and it marked Jeffra's third victory over Escobar in as many tries.

urging him on, and on the other, there was one of the gamest kids I have seen in action in many moons. Beaten beyond hopes, dropped three times for counts of nine, his face badly puffed, his side bruised and eye cut, and suffering from a double dislocation of the jaw, game Jeffra went down to defeat like a real fighting champion. It was no disgrace to lose in the manner he did. He struggled against great odds, weakened by body punishment and weight reduction, but wouldn't yield. No one would have blamed him had he quit under fire, but he possessed the fighting heart of a fighting champion and he fought as such to the final bell.

When in the 13th and again in the 15th rounds, he found the odds so great against him that it didn't seem he could carry on any longer, Jeffra saved himself by moving away as did Gene Tunney after his knockdown at the hands of Jack Dempsey in their Chicago bout. No one could blame Jeffra for his action, though he was booed by the partisan rooters who sensed "the kill" and wanted it consummated by Escobar. Such is the way with fight fans, especially in Latin-American countries.

For seven rounds, the fight was an even affair. As round after round was fought during those sessions, it seemed that whichever won, the victory would be by a hairline decision. Then came a collapse—in fact, it was like a total eclipse. Starting with the eighth round, Jeffra was so far outclassed by Escobar that the champion failed to take a single round.

But prior to that it was a nip-and-tuck affair, first the titleholder and then Escobar gaining the upper hand. Sharp hitting and clever boxing featured in those early rounds, with Escobar the calmer fighter, always ready to take advantage of any opening. It became apparent from the very start that Escobar's famous right would be his chief means of attack, and it was a right that started Jeffra on the road to ruin.

Any doubts about the final outcome of the fight were eliminated in the eighth when Escobar tore into Jeffra like a little wild man and never gave the champion a chance to catch his breath. It was a case of fight, fight, fight, all the way by the Puerto Rican challenger.

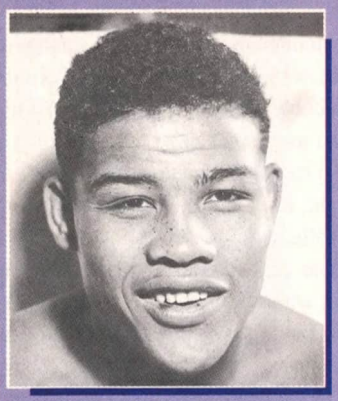
Escobar practically clinched victory in the 11th, when he scored his first knockdown. Jeffra didn't connect with more than four punches in the entire session, so busy was he trying to ward off the challenger's attack. Two right hooks to the body started the action for Escobar. The second one almost doubled up Jeffra, who winced with pain. Quick as a flash, while Jeffra was still in a slightly bending position, up came a terrific right hook, short and to the point. It crashed against Jeffra's jaw and dropped him for a count of nine.

Jeffra had tasted the sting of a knockdown only once before, in his fight with Danny London in the early part of his career. The blow from Escobar's fist carried T.N.T. with it. It stung and partially numbed him. He glanced at his seconds, who were shouting all kinds of advice and pleading with him to get up. As the count of nine was chanted, Jeffra gained his feet, only to meet a rushing Escobar, who, with fire in his eyes, was bent on avenging himself on the man who had thrice taken his measure.

Reeling around the ring, the claret flowing freely from the wounded eye, the other eye puffed and black and blue from the force of impact of Escobar's fists, jaw swollen, Jeffra took a severe shellacking in that session. Had the bout been staged in New York, it never would have gone beyond that round, but referee Johnny McAvoy acted properly because of the circumstances in letting the boys continue so long as no request was made by Jeffra to halt it. Driving into a neutral corner, Escobar, with only 50 seconds of the round to go, drove home three powerful lefts to the body, and as Jeffra was about to cave in, Escobar connected again with a right hook to the chin that didn't travel more than a few inches, and Jeffra again landed on the canvas.

This time he hit the deck with his back, and it looked like it was all over. The crowd went wild. Pandemonium reigned. Hats

THE RING RATINGS, May 1938



Joe Louis

HEAVYWEIGHTS
World Champ: Joe Louis
1. Max Schmeling
2. Max Baer
3. Gunnar Barlund
4. Nathan Mann
5. Tony Galento
6. Tommy Farr
7. Jimmy Adamick
8. Lou Nova
9. Bob Pastor
10. Buddy Baer

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
World Champ: John Henry Lewis
1. Al Gainer
2. Tiger Jack Fox
3. Jock McAvoy
4. Gus Lesnevich
5. Ralph De John
6. Eddie Wenstob
7. Melio Bettina
8. Dave Clark
9. Ray Actis
10. Fred Lenhart

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
World Champ: Freddie Steele
1. Young Corbett
2. Glen Lee
3. Fred Apostoli
4. Al Hostak
5. Solly Krieger
6. Teddy Yarosz
7. Carmelo Candel
8. Ben Brown
9. Eric Seelig
10. Ossie Stewart

WELTERWEIGHTS
World Champ: Barney Ross
1. Ceferino Garcia
2. Jack Carroll
3. Felix Wouters
4. Gustave Eder
5. Saverio Turiello
6. Kenny La Salle
7. Holman Williams
8. Milt Aron
9. Andrea Jessurun
10. Fritzie Zivic

LIGHTWEIGHTS
World Champ: Lou Ambers
1. Pedro Montanez
2. Davey Day
3. Wesley Ramey
4. Billy Beauhuld
5. Johnny Bellus
6. Tommy Cross
7. Petey Sarron
8. Irving Eldridge
9. Maxie Berger
10. Norment Quarles

FEATHERWEIGHTS
World Champ: Henry Armstrong
1. Freddie Miller
2. Leo Rodak
3. Ginger Foran
4. Jackie Wilson
5. Dick Corbett
6. Johnny Hutchinson
7. Al Reid
8. Mike Belloise
9. Pete Scalzo
10. Johnny Brown

BANTAMWEIGHTS
World Champ: Sixto Escobar
1. Harry Jeffra
2. Kayo Morgan
3. Pancho Villa
4. Baby Yack
5. Lou Salica
6. Indian Quintana
7. Georgie Pace
8. Al Brown
9. Tobe De La Rosa
10. Aurel Toma

FLYWEIGHTS
World Champ: Benny Lynch
1. Peter Kane
2. Tiny Bostock
3. Little Dado
4. Jackie Jurich
5. Tut Whalley
6. Jim Warnock
7. Valentin Anglemann
8. Fortunato Ortega
9. Frank Kid Bonser
10. Pat Palmer

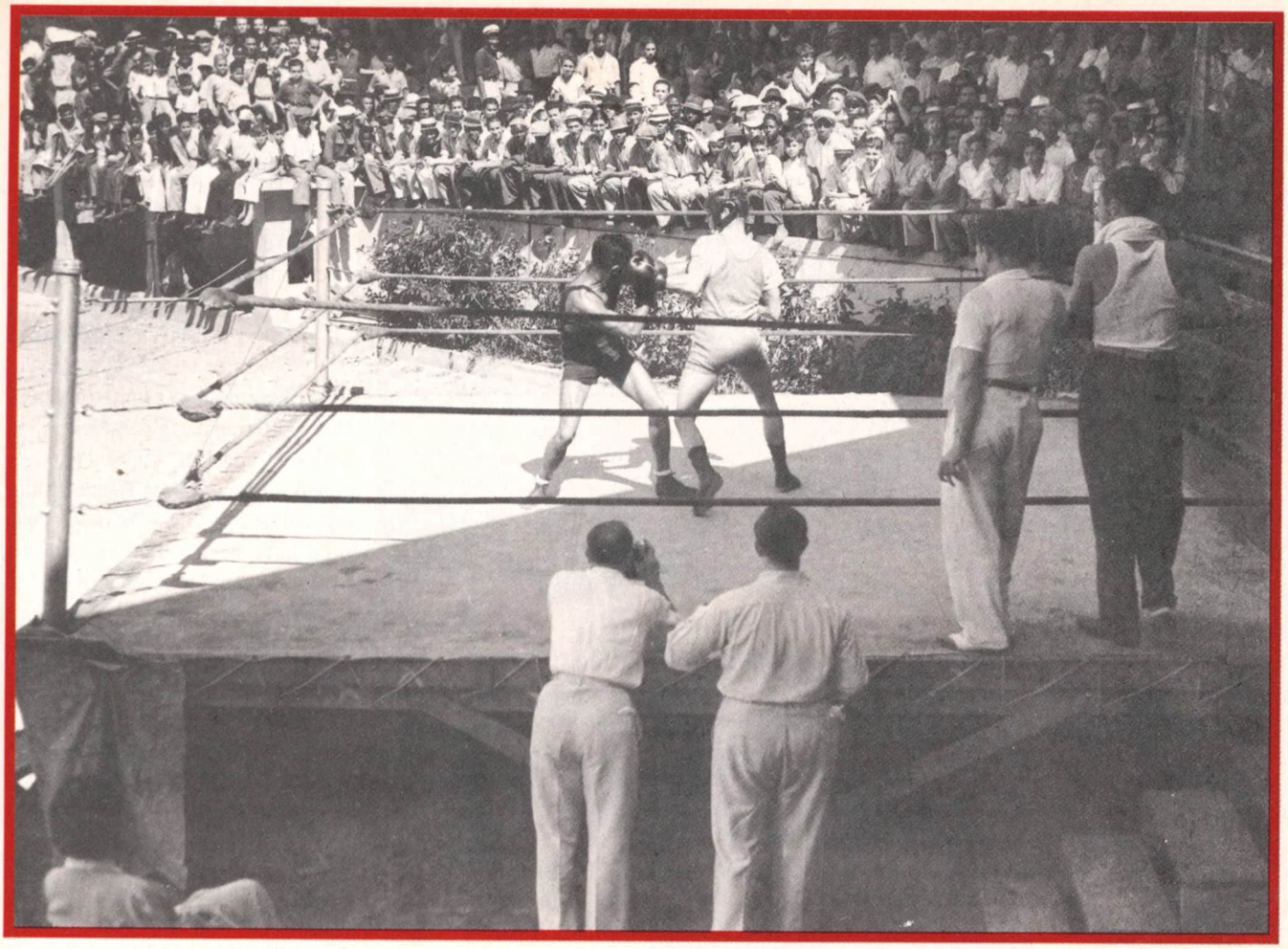
flew into the air and another wild, mad rush toward the ringside was on. Again the cops and spectators were rushed, pell-mell out of their places as everybody in the rear, tearing everything before them, came forward. Never has such a wild scene been duplicated at a fight at which I have been a spectator. Then followed a wild commotion caused by the action of Heinie Blaustein, co-manager of Jeffra with Max Waxman.

Blaustein, as the count began, leaped to the ring apron, grabbed the ropes, and rushed along the outside of the ring to where Jeffra was trying to raise himself, agony written all over his face. Blaustein was yelling at the top of his voice, advising his charge to get up.

"Get up, Harry. You can still beat him. You're not licked. Get up, Harry."

Those remarks, shouted it seemed dozens of times during the nine seconds, incensed the spectators, and that they didn't tear Blaustein apart was a miracle. Had Blaustein attempted that in any state of the Union, Jeffra would never have had the chance to fight the remaining rounds. That Blaustein inspired his boy goes without saying. His pleas kept Jeffra in the fight. The Puerto Rican scribes appealed to McAvoy to disqualify Jeffra through Blaustein's action, but McAvoy ignored their pleas.

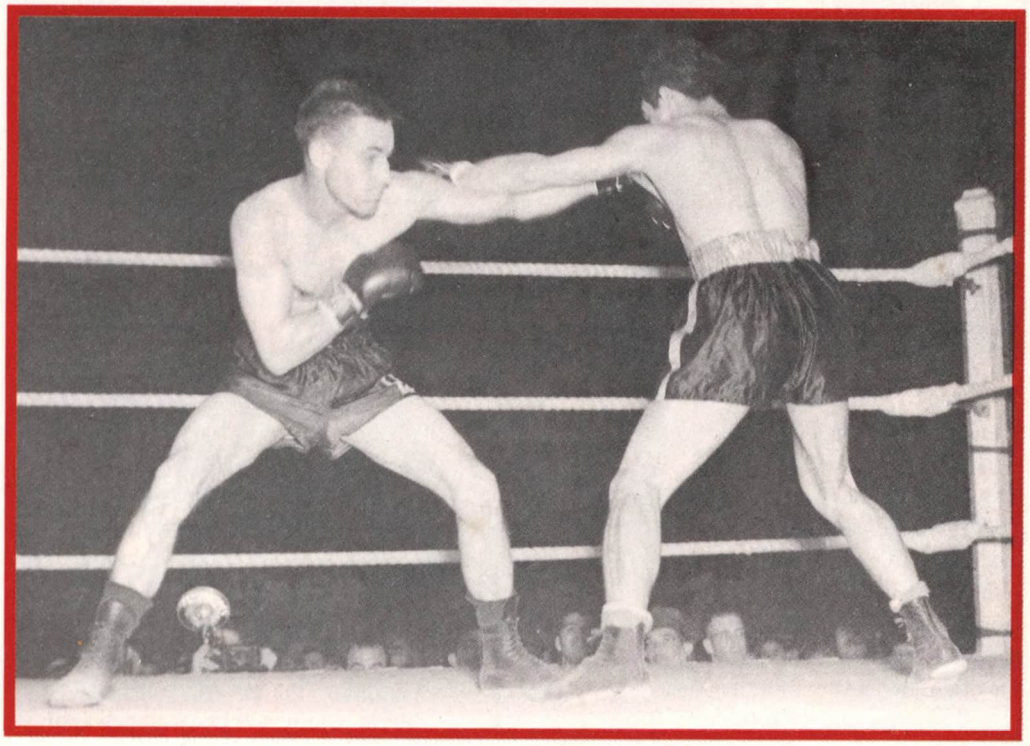
Just when it seemed that Jeffra was hopelessly outclassed, he came through with admiration, especially from Governor Winship and Federal Judge Cooper, who applauded the visitor with vim. In the 13th, Jeffra swung a left and it caught Escobar on the mouth. His head was tossed back and he looked up in surprise. He didn't



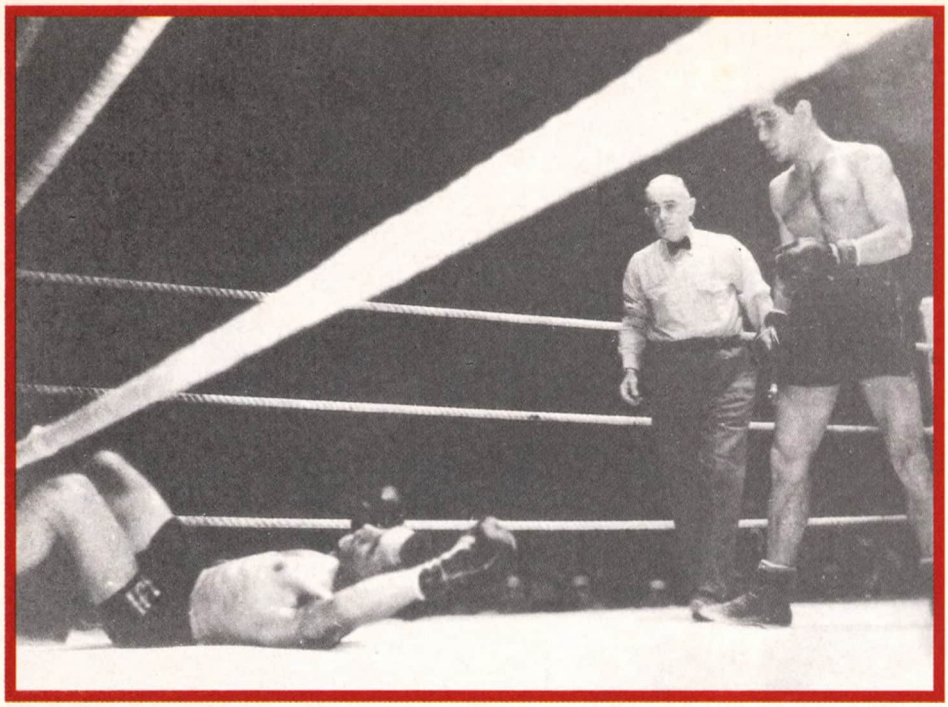
Jeffra (right, with head gear) trained in Puerto Rico for the title rematch with Escobar. Strong conditioning enabled Jeffra to endure 15 rounds of punishment.

think there was any more fight left in Jeffra, but that convinced him that he was still facing a courageous champion who was going down to defeat only as real titleholders go.

As Escobar came in, another left caught him in the stomach. Infuriated, Escobar drove home two vicious rights to the wounded jaw and two left hooks to the body that caused Jeffra to drop his guard and enabled Escobar to crash home a vicious left to the mouth that brought the claret. Jeffra wouldn't give in. He fought back as best he could and, in a mix-up at close range, a right hook cut a deep gash in Escobar's left eye and the blood gushed from the wound.



The first few rounds of the bout were extremely close. In this photo from round one, Jeffra and Escobar are probing each other with jabs, looking for openings. By the eighth, Escobar would take over.



Escobar scored two knockdowns in the 11th, including this one near the end of the round. It looked like the fight was over after Jeffra fell hard on his back, but the defending champion somehow managed to get up.

Shocked by the turn of affairs, as if struck by lightning, the native gathering was momentarily silenced while the tourists took up where the Puerto Ricans had left off. They shouted themselves hoarse, giving advice to the underdog—Jeffra. But that scene was changed in a jiffy. Quicker than it takes to write it, Escobar, like a maddened bull, rushed at his man, laced home a beautiful short right hook to the chin and a left to the midsection, and down went Jeffra for the third time. Jeffra was badly hurt. You could see that from the agony written on his face.

Again Jeffra took the count of nine, and when he came to his feet, it was a hopelessly whipped champion who was still making a game, most courageous attempt to turn the tide.

How Jeffra survived the 15th was a miracle. Hooks, jabs, and uppercuts came fast and often in the final session, with the champion on the receiving end. Jeffra was as wild as a March hare. He swung his left often, but Jeffra's efforts availed little because the blows landed on the ozone. Several times Jeffra connected with lefts to the body, but the punches were weak. As the last 30 seconds were reached, the champion stood near the ropes, groggy, a look of agony on his face. Only his fighting spirit, the gameness of a true titleholder, saved him from a knockout.

In the end, Escobar had his hand raised by referee Johnny McAvoy. Escobar's three knockdowns made the decision easy for the judges, who all agreed that Escobar swept the last eight rounds of the contest.

There could be no division of votes among the officials. The fists of Sixto Escobar had made matters simple for the judges and referee McAvoy, who feared the worst had the fight been close, because of the troublesome times the promoter had during the last 72 hours prior to the fight in selecting the judges.

The cards of the officials showed that McAvoy had given 11 rounds to Escobar, two for Jeffra and two even; Judge Edgar T. Thompson gave Escobar 10 rounds, three to Jeffra and two even; and I, as the other judge, tabbed 11 rounds for Escobar and four for Jeffra. Two of those four could have been called even, but I gave the champion the benefit of it in scoring the points. I decided to award every even round to the defending titleholder.

Throughout the streets of Puerto Rico, "Viva Sixto Escobar," came from the throats of all—old, gray-haired men and women, and boys and girls dressed in their best. Even kiddies so small they could hardly stand, led by their parents, waved flags and saluted the island's hero.

A hero Escobar certainly was. I thought that the sight I had witnessed last year over the same route following his triumph over Salica was the most fascinating I had ever seen, but this latest celebration outdid that by a wide margin.

By the time we reached Escobar's home burg, 47 automobiles were in the line of march, and the officials cars, with the exception of Escobar's, were trailing a mile behind. That's how big the welcome was!

Three bands, picked up on the road, accompanied us, and what a noise-making crew they were! With only two bass drums, a fife, a guitar, and a cornet to set the pace, the other players carried every variety of kitchen utensil imaginable to furnish the "music." It was like Coxey's army on parade, with fun had by all.

Escobar wore a bandage over his badly cut right eye, but that didn't stop his Puerto Rican countrymen from coming out to celebrate his victory. RING Editor Nat Fleischer (center, back) and former heavyweight champ Jack Dempsey (far right) were among the many on hand.

That's what Sixto Escobar's victory meant for Puerto Rico! When we arrived in Barceloneta, we were met by another band that led a parade of the city's notables, headed by the Mayor and Escobar's little sister. It was a turnout of the entire city. Three miles out, they formed their lines, and the parade into Barceloneta's City Hall was a parade of the triumphant—the city's own child came back to his own people.

Speech making in Spanish and English, and the granting of the freedom of the city to Lou Brix, Whitey Bimstein, and myself, was followed by a banquet at Escobar's home, fit for a king. I shall always cherish that heart-throbbing welcome of city officials and the Escobar family.

Let no one tell you that Puerto Rico doesn't think much of boxing or makes little of its champions. New York, the world center of boxing, never saw the day when it opened its heart to a champion as did Puerto Rico following Escobar's victory over Harry Jeffra.

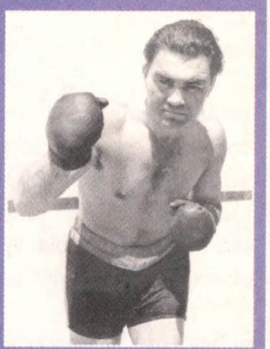
***

ADDENDUM: After regaining the bantamweight title, Escobar would only fight for two more years. His final fight, ironically, was against Jeffra, a 10-round decision loss on December 2, 1940. Escobar went 0-5-1 in his final six fights and concluded his career with a 46-23-3 (22) record—but he never did lose the title in the ring, instead relinquishing it in October '39. After his boxing career, Escobar served in the United States Army during World War II and owned real estate in Puerto Rico. He died on November 17, 1979, and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2002. ■

THE RING, May 1938

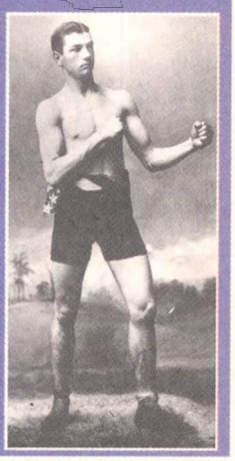
***The Cover*:** Middleweight contender Fred Apostoli graced the cover, but hardly anything was mentioned about Apostoli inside this issue, other than his name in the rankings. Instead, much of the attention was directed toward Sixto Escobar's thrilling 15-round decision over Harry Jeffra to regain the bantamweight title.

***Max Returns*:** Max Baer thrust himself back into heavyweight title contention with a 15-round decision over Tommy Farr. "Livermore Max" did something neither Joe Louis James Braddock could do: knock down the durable Farr. Baer scored three knockdowns, and might have stopped Farr if his own left eye hadn't swollen shut during the fight.



***White Hope Campaign*:** With Buddy Bear and Nathan Mann out of the running for the heavyweight crown after both were knocked out, those searching for a white hope turned again to Max Schmeling. The German veteran was the only fighter at the time who owned a victory over then-champ Louis.

***Whoop-De-Don'ts*:** The eccentric characters always helped make the sport of boxing unique, but in THE RING's view, the number of "Whoop-De-Doo" fighters—"the freaks, clowns, and daredevils of the ring"—was diminishing. There weren't many fighters anymore who gave the sport color the way Harry Greb (pictured) did.



***Blows That Count*:** Kid McCoy possessed one of the most famous punches in the history of boxing: the corkscrew. McCoy delighted in cutting up opponents. When his fist neared its target, McCoy would turn his wrist, and the twisting, corkscrew-like motion at the point of impact frequently caused damage.

THE FIGHT DOCTOR

HAND INJURIES: AN AVOIDABLE EPIDEMIC

By Margaret Goodman, MD

Every hand injury a boxer suffers is important. If ignored, a minor injury will become a major one. According to prominent New York hand surgeon Dr. Charles P. Melone, who has treated hundreds of boxers, "One-third of all boxing injuries involve the hands. Moreover, the high incidence relates to unsupervised punching and unlimited sparring, especially at an early age."

Dr. Melone believes boxers can improve the situation by following baseball's example. "As in baseball, numbers of punches should be monitored, like pitches. Roger Clemens could not have won the Cy Young Award seven times without close follow-up on how often he uses his pitching arm."

Top trainer and two-division former titleholder Buddy McGirt also believes the high incidence of hand injuries in boxers is due to poor supervision and care on the part of trainers.

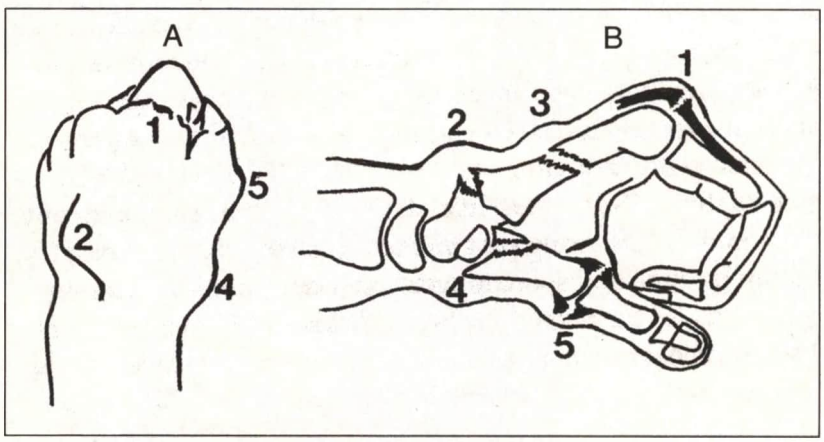
"Boxing is the only sport where a guy who has never fought a day in his life can put a towel over his shoulder and call himself a trainer," said McGirt. "How can these guys know how a hand should be protected or when to take the kid to the doctor?"

Of course, hands are abused by the nature of the sport, but proper care from the start can prevent a lot of problems. This includes cardiovascular fitness, seeking treatment as soon as possible for pain and inflammation, and the use of protective shock-absorbing gear in the gym and in a fight.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Following training, sparring, or a fight, if a boxer continues to have hand pain for more than a few days, he should seek immediate medical attention. Swelling is not a totally accurate indicator as it may resolve and the fighter can still have a problem.

The doctor, preferably an orthopedic hand specialist, will examine the boxer for painful joint laxity (weak joints), deformities, and limited joint motion. Typically, X-rays follow. Computerized axial tomography (CAT) scans or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may be useful in select cases of ligament or tendon injury.



This illustration by Dr. Charles P. Melone, taken from the book* Ringside And Training Principles, *shows five of the most common hand injuries suffered by boxers.

Some of the common hand injuries boxers suffer are:

•Boxer's knuckle *(see figure A/B, 1)* is the most common, and results in partial or complete tendon rupture of the second digit. It is treated by splinting or casting, and sometimes surgery.

•Metacarpal Boss injury *(see figure A/B, 2)* results in complete or partial disruption of the joints at the base of the fingers. Usually it involves the index or long fingers. Typically, you see a painful bump over the top of the hand, and it is often confused with a fracture.

•Fractures *(see figure B, 3)* usually involve the metacarpal bones (often the

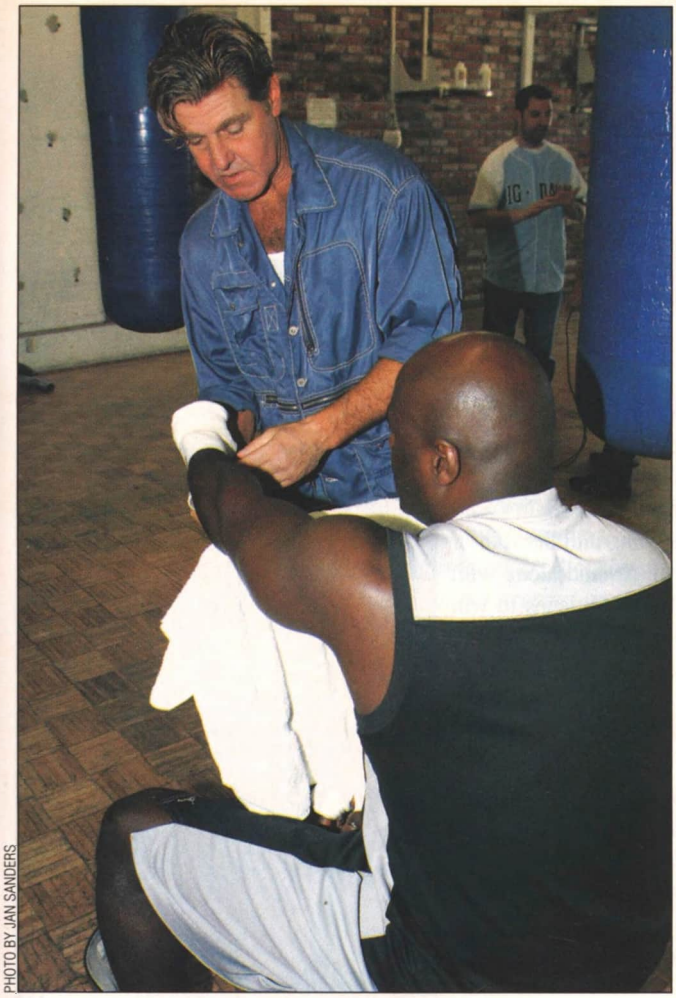


PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Trainer Joe Goossen wraps Cedric Boswell's hands prior to a workout. Proper wrapping is crucial in the prevention of hand injuries.

ring finger). If displaced, it will require surgery, as opposed to a non-displaced fracture that can be treated with casting/splinting.

•Bennet fracture-dislocation at the base of the thumb *(see figure A/B, 4)* is the most common fracture and usually requires surgery.

•Collateral ligament thumb injuries *(see figure A/B, 5)*, typically called a "Gamekeeper's Thumb," occurs at the knuckle of the thumb. Depending on the severity, it can require surgery.

Initially, hand injuries may benefit from hand elevation, ice, anti-inflammatories, and splinting. Some can benefit from local injections of anti-inflammatories. However, too many injections should be avoided. The treatment objective is complete healing and rehabilitation before returning to sparring.

The Rules

The Association of Boxing Commissions regulations state: "Handwraps shall be restricted to no more than 20 yards soft gauze, not more than two inches wide. The gauze shall be held in place by no more than eight feet of adhesive tape, not more than 1½ inches wide. The adhesive tape shall not cover any part of the knuckles when the hand is clenched to make a fist. The use of water or any other liquid or material is strictly prohibited."

The rules regarding gloves are less detailed. The thumb, however, must be attached to prevent eye injuries, and the gloves cannot be manipulated or altered in any manner.

The promoter shall provide new gloves for all main events and championship fights. Undercard fighters and their trainers should make an effort to examine the gloves and make certain they are not broken down. If this is the case, they should ask the commission to have the promoter rectify the situation.

All of these stipulations are designed to make a level playing field, while protecting the fighter's hands.

Prevention

Although commission rules regarding handwraps must be followed in a fight, these should be used to the fighter's advantage. When wrapping a fighter's hands, Dr. Melone recommends that trainers evenly distribute the gauze so it tapers over the knuckles.

"Too many trainers make the handwraps too bulky and neglect to protect the knuckles, where most of the injuries occur," said Dr. Melone. "There should be no limitation on the amount of gauze and tape used."

Dr. Melone adds that the fear of turning the handwrap into a cast with excess gauze and tape is unfounded because using too much would contribute to hand problems.

McGirt agrees: "I believe in using padding, but not too thick, as it won't absorb the punishment. It also won't protect the areas most prone to injury, the hands will be improperly weighted, and the end result will be more injury."

McGirt also encourages his fighters to fight with a closed hand, not slap, and stay away from hitting the elbows.

According to former WBA light heavyweight titleholder and trainer Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, most hand injuries can be prevented by proper prefight care. This includes massaging the hands before wrapping them. Mustafa Muhammad considered himself a "puncher," and said he never had hand problems using full handwraps in the gym, 16-ounce gloves, and staying away from the heavybag as much as possible.

Joe Guzman, director of professional boxing for Everlast Worldwide, acknowledges that glove manufacturers have had to adapt with changing times and technology. This included eliminating horsehair stuffing, which can break down and separate, and implementation of specialized foams that will mold to the shape of the hand.

"Most of the fighters we see hurt their hands in training, and then go into a fight with problems," noted Guzman. "Fighters should do hand conditioning exercises, and make certain the glove he chooses protects the knuckles and provides proper energy absorption when punches are landed."

While no fighter goes into a fight 100 percent, remember, there are implications to fighting with a bad hand. Injecting a hand too close to a contest is illegal, will alter the fighter's sense of pain, and can result in fractures and permanent hand problems. Furthermore, using prohibited anti-inflammatory medicines to cover up a hand injury can predispose a fighter to other medical issues such as cuts, facial swelling, or even brain bleeds.

Bottom line: Boxers must never forget that their hands are their livelihood and must use common sense in treating injuries and follow their doctor's advice. ■

Dr. Goodman will be happy to answer questions about the medical aspects of boxing in future columns. Please send inquiries to: The Fight Doctor, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034.

COME OUT WRITING

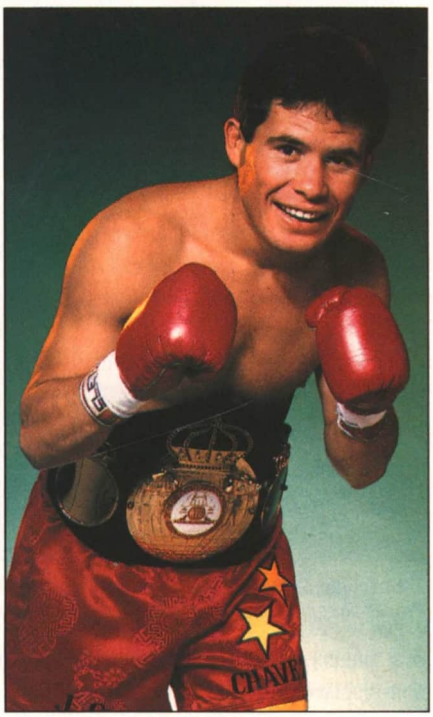
Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Or e-mail letters to comeoutwriting@yahoo.com. E-mailed letters will include the writer's e-mail address unless a city and state of origin is provided.

CHAVEZ BEFORE GATTI

There have been a lot of people writing about Arturo Gatti getting into the Hall of Fame. But what has Gatti done recently to go to the Hall? Julio Cesar Chavez is the one who should be going into the Hall of Fame. Chavez accomplished so much, and along with Erik Morales, he is one of only two Mexicans to win titles in three weight divisions.

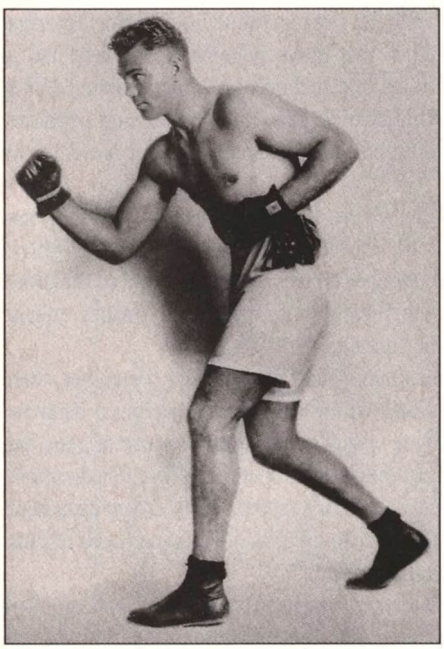
Chavez beat many great fighters, including Meldrick Taylor, Edwin Rosario, Jose Luis Ramirez, Sammy Fuentes, Hector Camacho, Juan Laporte, Roger Mayweather, and Tony Lopez. Gatti has not beaten any great fighters. Wins over Leonard Dorin, Micky Ward, and Gianluca Branco are not enough to get into the Hall, unless Gatti also beats Floyd Mayweather and Kostya Tszyu.

MICHAEL DEALBA
Mikedealba20@yahoo.com



There's been a lot of debate recently in "Come Out Writing" about whether or not Arturo Gatti has done enough to qualify for the Hall of Fame. Reader Michael Dealba writes to point out that another junior welterweight, Julio Cesar Chavez, has done a lot more than Gatti to qualify for induction.

WHERE'S DEMPSEY?



Reader Jeff Morgan enjoyed the feature article about bodypunching that appeared in a recent issue, but was surprised that legendary former heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey, a fierce bodypuncher, was not included.

First, I would like to congratulate THE RING for your ratings system. It's about time somebody took steps to determining real champions away from backdoor politics and influence peddling. Congratulations.

But I must admit I was a little surprised to read Don Stradley's article on body-punching in the February 2005 issue of THE RING EXTRA and see that some notable body-punchers were left out. Not to take anything away from the fighters listed, but where is Jack Dempsey? Many remember him for his slaughter of Jess Willard, the fiasco with Luis Angel Firpo, and the "long-count" with Gene Tunney. But Dempsey was also known for his body attack. Throwing bodyshots won him many fights or set his foes up for the kill. After John Lester Johnson broke his ribs, Dempsey reevaluated his style and became a terror. He commonly used a one-two, usually going downstairs with the first and then coming upstairs with the second. Bill Brennan, Billy Miske, Carl Morris, and Fred Fulton would all attest to that.

JEFF MORGAN
Mayo, FL

AMAZED AND APPALLED

I just read Nigel Collins' "Ringside" editorial in February 2005 of THE RING EXTRA and I agree completely with his comments. Like Collins, I am also appalled and amazed at the mainstream media and their curious non-coverage of boxing. I am amazed because, as Collins so ably points out, boxing is huge in sheer economic numbers. I am appalled because, as anyone who has ever been at a big fight can tell you,

boxing at its best is the most dramatic and exciting thing in all of sports.

I've been reading THE RING for four decades, and it is now the best it has ever been. Please keep the faith. There are a lot of us out there who love what you are doing.

FRANK GANNON
Demorest, GA

WHAT DID JACK DO?

The recent PBS documentary, *The Fight*, about the Joe Louis-Max Schmeling era, brought to mind the life of Jack Blackburn, Louis' excellent trainer and a former fighter. I have read varying accounts of the crime that Blackburn was convicted of back in 1909. What's the real story?

SHERWOOD WILLITS
Camas, WA

[Editor's note: Blackburn was sentenced to 15 years in prison after being convicted of manslaughter in 1909. According to contemporary newspaper reports, Blackburn shot three people in the early morning hours of January 1 at a party in Philadelphia. One of the victims, Alonzo Polk, died of his wounds. Blackburn was paroled after serving less than five years, and became one of the greatest trainers of all-time. He was 58 when he died of pneumonia in April 1942 with Louis still on the heavyweight throne.]

RUMBLE REDUX

I thoroughly enjoyed the magazine within a magazine "The Rumble In The Jungle Revisited" (THE RING DOUBLE, Volume II, 2004). Of particular interest was the article written for THE RING in October 1974 by Don King. I know the flamboyant promoter is vilified and blamed for many of the ills that plague the sport, but he has been involved in some of the biggest and best fights of the past 30 years. Reading his opinions and insights on the Rumble was very informative about the fight's behind-the-scenes goings on. Looking back and remembering all the heavyweights of that era really emphasizes how sad the division is now.

RICKY FLANAGAN
House Springs, MO

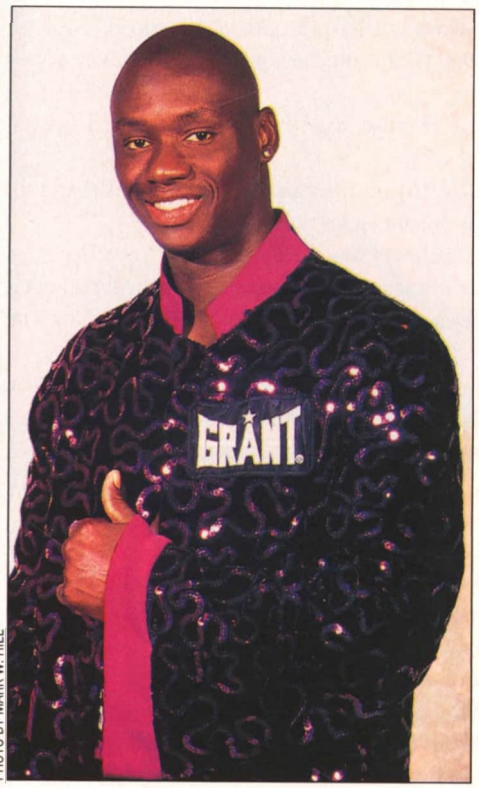


PHOTO BY MARK W. HILL

Light heavyweight champion Antonio Tarver (pictured) and Glen Johnson have handed back their alphabet titles in order to fight for Tarver's RING belt. Reader Orlando Valles writes to congratulate both fighters for doing the right thing.

GETTING IT RIGHT

As a die-hard boxing fan, I would like to thank Antonio Tarver, Glen Johnson, and everyone in their respective management and promotional teams for getting it right. They have followed the example Marco Antonio Barrera and few others have set by dismissing the Alphabet Soup Gangs and agreeing to toss their superficial titles in the trash where they belong to put on a fight that just makes sense. All due respect to Rico Hoye and Paul Briggs, but Tarver-Johnson is the kind of fight that could help put boxing back in the mainstream. I know this is a bit idealistic, but here's hoping this will become the norm and boxers will help themselves by putting the alphabet soup on the outside looking in.

LT. ORLANDO VALLES, USAF
Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, AZ ■

LOOKING AHEAD

By Eric Raskin

DOUBLE FELIX?

Sturm: Will he get his Fe-licks in?

After it was announced that the second fight of **Felix Trinidad's** comeback would be on March 12 on pay-per-view, the rumor mill quickly got out of control, with many sources reporting that "Tito's" opponent would be the formidable **Felix Sturm**. But the truth is that as of late-November, that fight was not yet signed. Not even close.

But it *is* being strongly considered. And it *is* the fight Sturm yearns for above all others.

"I want him next, no question," Sturm told THE RING during a break from training in Germany. Sturm was preparing for a seemingly easy December fight against used up **Hassine Cherifi**, and couldn't help but think about the bigger fights on the horizon. "I think Felix is a great champion, one of the best fighters of the last 20 years. My next fight is an important fight. I want it to be a big one. I'm ready to fight Felix."

Believe it or not, Sturm hasn't seen Trinidad's fight against **Ricardo Mayorga** yet—he's still waiting for the tape—but he isn't overly concerned with how brutally effective the Puerto Rican was.

"Look, Mayorga is a fighter who is made for Felix," said the German. "Mayorga is a tough fighter, but he's not one of the best fighters in the world. Felix can fight better fighters than Ricardo Mayorga. When he fights someone like **Winky Wright**, he's going to have many more problems. And if he fights me, I know I can give him problems too."

Those problems should begin with Sturm's jab, one of the best in the sport. Behind that stiff left stick, Sturm did enough in the minds of many to upset **Oscar De La Hoya** last June (he ultimately dropped a narrow decision, his only pro loss), and he says he learned a lot from that fight and is now punching with more power in both his right hand and his left hook.

When asked if he's ever fought anyone who hits as hard as Trinidad, the best Sturm could offer was, "I don't know." In other words, no. But that doesn't concern him terribly.

"When you box with Felix, he has no chance," Sturm asserted. "Against **Bernard Hopkins** and Oscar, they showed you can beat Felix by boxing him. I think I can box him and not let his power beat me."

Sturm also doesn't want to let the judges beat him, which he believes was the case against De La Hoya. He insists that the next time he fights in the United States—whether it's against Trinidad or not—he will pull out if more than one of the three judges is American. But he doesn't want to have to do that. As he kept telling THE RING over and over, he just wants to fight.

"I'd like to fight every good fighter in the world," he said. "There are good middleweights from America, good middleweights from Puerto Rico, but I think the best middleweight comes from Germany."

Winning the battle of the Felixes would be a huge step toward proving that bold statement.

LISTEN UP

Pongsaklek: The reign continues on

A couple of issues ago, this column focused on the return of former welterweight titlist **Ike Quartey**. We've since learned that "Bazooka's" first fight back is scheduled for January 14 in Accra, Ghana … *ShoBox* has some intriguing fights on tap for early-'05. On January 21, undefeated welterweight **Chris Smith** takes on once-beaten *ShoBox* vet **David Estrada**, while undefeated middleweight prospect **Sechew Powell** faces a tough test in once-beaten **Aslanbek Kodzoev**. And on February 18, a battle of unbeatens is planned between **David Diaz** and **Demetrius Hopkins**, with **Oscar Diaz** taking on **Al Gonzales** in the co-feature. Both cards will take place at Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut … February 26 is the date for the important European light heavyweight bout between **Fabrice Tiozzo** and **Darius Michalczewski**. The Color Line Arena in Hamburg, Germany, will host … On January 29, THE RING'S number-one flyweight, **Pongsaklek Wonjongkam**, will go for his 11th title defense, taking on relatively unknown **Noriyuki Komatsu** in Osaka, Japan. ■

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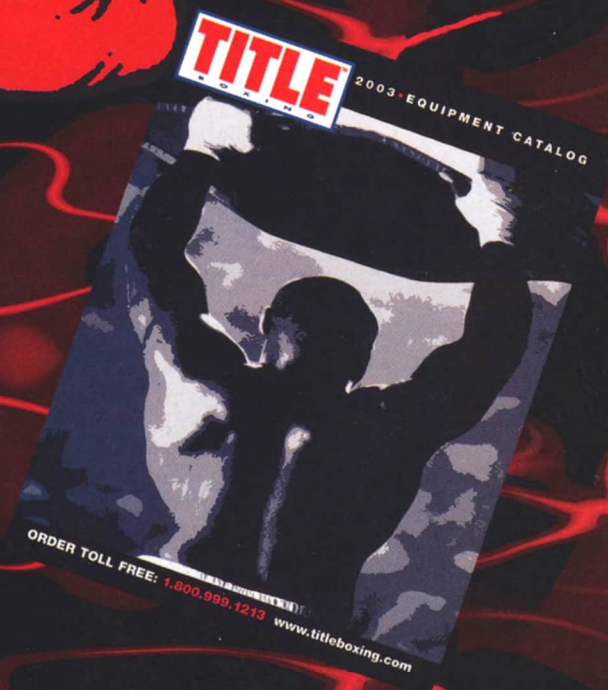

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